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SOMEWHERE BETWEEN 'US' AND 'THEM':

Black Columnists and Their Role in Shaping Racial Discourse

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Dissertation

SOMEWHERE BETWEEN "US" AND "THEM":

Black Columnists and Their Role in Shaping Racial Discourse

by

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Dissertation

Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School of

The University of Texas at Austin

in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements

for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

The University of Texas at Austin

December 2014

Acknowledgments

Throughout my studies at the University of Texas at Austin, I often said (sheepishly but honestly): "It takes a village for me for me to get a doctorate." Many people in the School of Journalism helped me on this journey: the faculty, staff (especially the graduate coordinator Sylvia Edwards), and my fellow graduate students, who are caring, funny, and indeed the best and the brightest. We remain scholastic cousins, even if I am the older relative. I am also grateful for being around undergraduates, whose enthusiasm and earnestness were a constant reminder of why I chose to teach them.

But in completing this dissertation and this program, I am especially indebted to my chair, Dr. Paula M. Poindexter. Long before I entered the doctoral program, Dr. Poindexter asked me directly – as only she can – why would I leave a secure position in journalism for academia full time. It was a very good question that thankfully gave me pause; thanks to her astute observation, I did not attempt to earn a doctorate until I was indeed ready for the rigor of research. Since then, she has been my champion, coach, and mentor. With her grace, intelligence, patience, and determination, Dr. Poindexter is a force of nature whose sheer will got me this far.

I could not have chosen a better committee – Drs. Robert Jensen, Tom Johnson, Regina Lawrence, and Eric Tang. Each gave more than time and intellectual heft to this research. Dr. Jensen's faith in me kept me going. Dr. Johnson's door was always open for my endless questions. I hope that Dr. Lawrence's work and approach to media research

rubs off on me. And Dr. Tang has inspired me to think about the world, race, and academia in ways I previously would not have imagined.

I will never be able to repay Tracy Dahlby, who also has been my champion while instructing me by example how to teach with patience, humor and efficiency. He, Bill Minutaglio, Kate Dawson, Wanda Cash, and Drs. Mary Bock, Renita Coleman, Nick Lasorsa, Max McCombs, Stephen Reese, George Sylvie, and Rusty Todd never shooed me away when I asked for impromptu advice. Glenn Frankel, the school's former director, was both an inspiration and a confidant, and taught me much about journalism and journalism administration. Indeed, every School of Journalism faculty member preaches and practices doing what is best for its graduate students.

I also want to thank Dr. Marvin Hackert of the Harrington Fellows program, which not only provided financial relief but also access to a broad, extraordinary community of scholars at the University of Texas. I am also very grateful for the patience and encouragement of Dr. Derina Holtzhausen, the director of Oklahoma State's School of Media & Strategic Communications, and my O.S.U. colleagues.

I am grateful for the continuing support I have received from my former *New York Times* colleagues, who encouraged me to complete a master's degree while I worked full time and then cheered me on as I embarked on an academic journey far from my journalistic home on Times Square.

Finally, words cannot do justice to the love and support that only family can supply. My late parents, Lucinda and George McElroy, instilled in me a love of journalism and the value of education. Both "Macs" are inspirations – George as a

journalism educator and a pioneering journalist and columnist in the mainstream news media and the Black Press, and Lucinda as a sports-loving woman with a deep well of patience and love. Sitting around our dining room table as we traded sports sections every morning and afternoon remains my favorite memories of them.

I am forever grateful to my four sisters, Toni, Linda, Sherridan, and Madeline, who cheered me on, shared in my ups and downs, read passages of my work without rolling their eyes, and on whose shoulders I sit. Their support and faith in me never wavered. Even though my name will be on this dissertation and on my degree, this work also belongs to them.

Somewhere Between "Us" and "Them":
Black Columnists and Their Role in Shaping Racial Discourse

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The University of Texas at Austin, 2014

Supervisor: Paula M. Poindexter

Communication scholarship on black journalists has mostly focused on their lack of empowerment and the constraints that prevent them from engaging as full partners in the journalism industry, which has been shown to be ambivalent about the role of race in professional work. Racial discourse studies assert that blacks have little say in their representation by the media, where African Americans and other minority groups are treated as the negative "them" rather than the positive mainstream "us." This dissertation examines journalism and racial discourse from a little-explored perspective in both fields: that of elite black columnists, who have the platform and autonomy to discuss news in general and race in particular from an African-American point of view.

This dissertation examined the work of 11 African-American columnists who have won the Pulitzer Prize for commentary or write for one of the country's highest-

circulation publications. After textual analyses of more than 3,000 of their columns and in-depth, elite interviews with five columnists, this study found that elite black columnists wrote extensively and strategically about race at a level previously unrecognized in academia.

The study found that the columnists heavily relied on biography and history in constructing a black narrative, which is not usually associated with journalistic work but helped them make sense of the black experience and to explain it to their mostly white readership. The research also identified six related frames the columnists used to provide context to news coverage about black America. Three frames explained the "problem people" image of black America: the devaluation of black life, misrepresentation, and destructive racial discourse. Three were correctives to that image: the raising of critical racial consciousness (while unmasking whiteness), black responsibility and black pride, and reverence for the Constitution and American ideals. The findings showed that elite black columnists were actively engaged in what could be called an antiracist racial project: to not only counter inequality and misrepresentation but also to battle the forces within discourse that feed the "us" vs. "them" ideology.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

In their influential book *The Elements of Journalism*, Bill Kovach and Tom Rosenstiel (2007) list 10 principles for responsible journalism, including the duty of telling the truth, and independence from those in power and those being covered (pp. 5-6). They intentionally left off objectivity, the professional paradigm for newspapers since the turn of the 20th century and still considered by many as one of journalism's most sacred rules (Schudson, 2011; Jones, 2009). But Kovach and Rosenstiel contend that "being impartial or neutral is not a core principal of journalism" (p. 115). Their proof is opinion journalism, which is analysis and commentary written by journalists who adhere to professional ethics. Opinion journalism became a staple of newspapers and magazines primarily to complement objective reporting (Schudson, 2011; McNair, 2008; Riley, 1998; Silvester, 1997). Facts were not enough to explain the complex world after World War I; readers needed explanations. Schudson (1981) asserts that opinionated columns were "journalism's most important institutional acknowledgement that there were no longer facts, only individually constructed interpretations" (p. 151).

Columnists hold a hierarchical position above most reporters and editors in publication newsrooms. In fact, columnists associated with Op-Ed pages (originally, the commentary page *opposite* the editorials) are physically separated from the main newsroom and are given autonomy to set their own journalistic agenda. But even columnists writing for local news and sports pages have a greater name recognition than

reporters who often appear on the front page. No matter the events of the day, the columns occupy the same position on a page (usually a newspaper column width, thus their name) and are published on specific days, usually with their image and name prominently displayed (Silvester, 1997; Meyer, 1990). Readers recall what columnists write by their name, not their headline: "Did you read Kelso today?" But what differentiates columnists from news reporters is their journalistic mission: to be opinionated rather than neutral, personal rather than detached, rhetorically ambitious rather than straightforward. As McNair (2008) put it, "Where the reporter says, 'this is what happened,' the columnist says, 'here is the news, as reported elsewhere. This is what I think about it' " (p. 109). Ignoring such conventions as the inverted pyramid writing style, columnists are prized for their storytelling abilities and discourse authority (McNair, 2008; Riley, 1998; Meyer, 1990; Silvester, 1997; Avlon, Angelo, & Louis, 2011). Columnists are free "to call somebody 'a terrorist' " whom a reporter might have to describe as "a militant" or "activist" (Kovach & Rosenstiel, 2011, p. 118). They "speak in a voice readers understand—their own, but just a bit better":

> It is a voice that comforts and confronts. A great column is both a witness and a work of art — helping people understand the world around them while making them feel a little less alone (Avlon, Angelo & Louis, 2011, p. 13).

The instant accessibility of facts and news in the 21st century has strengthened the significance of columnists in the struggling print industry because they usually consume fewer newsroom resources than reporters and are easy to brand (McNair, 2008).

Even before the present-day emphasis on commentary, opinion journalists had

risen to the status of public elite (Kovach & Rosenstiel, 2011; McNair, 2008; Meyer, 1990). Leonard Pitts Jr., who won the Pulitzer Prize for commentary in 2004, notes that columnists "are given something everyone else wants. A voice. A megaphone. The ability to be heard" (Martinez Standring, 2008). As early as 1926, successful columnists bore "the same relation to the rest of the newspaper force that a predatory home-run hitter bears to the rest of a winning baseball team" (Avlon, Angelo & Louis, 2011, p. 15). Some columnists become their city's alter ego. Mike Royko, whose memorial service was held at Wrigley Field in 1997, was considered as iconic to Chicago as Michael Jordan and Al Capone (Terry, 1997).

The powerful read the best-known political columnists, who are instrumental not only in shaping public knowledge but also calibrating a community's ethics and politics (Duff, 2008, p. 230). For instance, Lippmann's (1922) concept of "pictures in our head" presaged such communication theories as agenda-setting, the social construction of reality, and framing. But his greater influence was in Washington, where he was one of the 20th century's most influential public intellectuals (Meyer, 1990; Rivers, 1965; Kovach & Rosenstiel, 2011). The Marshall Plan was drafted with Lippmann in mind, and his columns influenced Khrushchev during the Cuban missile crisis (Rivers, 1965, p. 59). President John F. Kennedy cursed *The New York Times'* Arthur Krock (Silvester, 1997, p. xv). President Lyndon Johnson fixated on Lippmann and his conservative rival, Joe Alsop (Meyer, 1990; Rivers, 1965). After sending more troops to Vietnam, Johnson remarked: "There, that should keep Joe Alsop quiet for a while" (Silvester, 1997, p. xv;

Meyer, 1990). Tom Wicker and Carl T. Rowan were on Nixon's enemies list (McFadden, 2011; Riley, 1998).

Among President Obama's favorites are *Business Insider*'s Josh Barro, *New York*'s Jonathan Chait, and the former *Washington Post* journalist Ezra Klein – "smart, nerdy types" (McMorris-Santoro, 2013). The president telephoned *The Washington Post's* Eugene Robinson to congratulate him for winning the 2009 Pulitzer Prize for commentary—but added he had not liked Robinson's column that morning on Latin America policy (Robinson, 2013). Despite a background in foreign correspondence, Robinson had been awarded the Pulitzer for columns that focused "on the election of the first African-American president, showcasing graceful writing and grasp of the larger historic picture." Robinson, like Pitts, is African American. In fact, eight of the thirteen solo Pulitzer Prizes awarded to black journalists in writing categories are in the commentary division. Most of the eight columnists were awarded for writing about race and topics associated with race, like under-representation. Sam G. Riley (1998), a biographer of American columnists, calls the "considerable increase" in columnists of color the most significant trend in commentary in the 1990s (p. 195). But he also notes the difficulties that many columnists faced because of their skin color. Betty Bayé (1998), a retired columnist, explains the rhetorical difficulties of writing for a mainstream publication:

> I contend that the African-American columnist working in the white-owned press is obligated by history to carefully construct his or her words when offering commentary on the touchy subjects of race, particularly when anti-black sentiment – and when has that not been so? – run high. … I must also

> exercise caution when writing on matters of race because black Americans and white Americans often mouth identical words, but the meaning is entirely different (p. 165).

Even though columnists possess an elite status in discourse, the communication field has paid scant attention to the ways opinion columns construct news and shape public consciousness (Duff, 2008; Golan & Wanta, 2004). And despite the presence of black columnists in mainstream newspapers since the mid-1960s – even before the 1968 Kerner Report urged the immediate integration of mainstream newsrooms – there is even less analysis of the connection between opinion journalism and the coverage of race.

Color-blindness is not an option in opinion journalism because the columnist's personal identity is considered synonymous with his or her work (Good, 1993; Avlon, Angelo & Louis, 2011; Riley, 1998). Pride and Wilson (1997) point out in their history of the Black Press that the personal identity of opinion leaders was key to editorial crusades (p. 150). Yet Kovach and Rosenstiel (2011) are unsure of diversity's role in journalism, wondering how to balance "the undeniable influence of personal perspective with the goal of maintaining something called journalistic independence" (p. 133). On one hand, they consider former Nixon aide William Safire a legitimate journalist who fulfilled their ninth principle of following one's personal conscience. Safire was "his own man, still conservative, but now working for his readers" (p. 116). But Kovach and Rosenstiel deny equal significance to the personal attributes that diverse journalists possess:

> Whatever adjective attaches itself to them as journalists – Buddhists, African American, disabled, gay, Hispanic, Jewish, WASP, or even liberal or conservative

> – it becomes descriptive but not limiting. They are journalists who are also Buddhist, African American, conservative – not Buddhist first and journalist second. What happens, racial, ethnic, religious, class and ideological backgrounds inform their work, but do not dictate it (p. 134).

By their logic, it was acceptable for Safire to be a conservative columnist but unacceptable for Bayé to be a black columnist; only certain kinds of identity gain favored status while others —and "Others" — do not. This attitude in journalism results in racial coverage from the perspective of the positive white "us" that contrasts with the negative "them" (van Dijk, 1991; 1992; Larson, 2006). Kovach and Rosenstiel's comments reveal how the "invisible privileges of whiteness" often trick white people, especially those within the communication field, "to deem their racial identity as a nonissue" while undervaluing the significance of race in communication studies (Allen, 2007, p. 260). Their reasoning also explains why the diversification of newsrooms since the 1968 Kerner Report has been "slow, troubled and incomplete" (Schudson, 2011, p. 104). Black reporters have been denied assignments because their white bosses did not believe they could be objective (Newkirk, 2000, pp. 132 and 158). They were more likely to be given less glamorous assignments and beats associated with pathological black America (Poindexter, Smith, & Heider, 2003; Pritchard & Stonbely, 2007). Yet they also felt stifled in improving the coverage of African-Americans (Newkirk, 2000; Wilson, 1991).

On the surface, then, black columnists would seem to be Kerner descendants with full inheritance: they have the mandate and dedicated space "to tell it like it is" on a variety of subjects, including race in America. But to paraphrase what Wilson (1991)

calls a paradox for black journalists – and in light of Kovach and Rosenstiel's opinion of journalistic diversity – are these columnists who happen to be black, or blacks who happen to be columnists? Which factors flip the switch? When and how in the column-writing process do they negotiate, leverage, or ignore their blackness?

Answers to these questions could shed light on racial discourse in the United States. More than any other institution, the news media shape the way African-Americans and other groups are perceived (Entman & Rojecki, 2001). But Kellstedt (2003) contends that academia has ignored the news media's role "in the unfolding drama of race in America" (p. 5). For instance, W.E.B. Du Bois turned from academia to the "more effective strategy of 'military journalism' " to fight racism (Gates, 2007).

Equally crucial is the role of journalism norms in the construction of racial discourse. Anecdotal evidence suggests that some black columnists, especially those writing for lower-profile publications, face frustrations in the newsroom simply because of their minority status (Riley, 1998, p. 215; Wickham, 1998; Fitzgerald, 1996; Nieman Reports, 1993). This dissertation analyzes the practices and perspectives of elite black columnists writing for mainstream publications, journalists with the privileged position of articulating the black experience to white America. They are the preferred "us" in terms of newsroom status and as part of the capitalist news media industry while remaining historically "them." This study will examine the ways their columns on race might bridge that dichotomy. The main theoretical frameworks will be (1) Du Bois' concept of double consciousness (1903), which explains the psychic duality of blacks living under white

domination and, in this study, the journalistic duality of black columnists; and (2) media sociology, which emphasizes that social factors control the construction of news content (Shoemaker & Reese, 2013), and media sociology's engagement with racial framing.

This study will focus on 11 elite black columnists writing for mainstream publications to examine their role in racial discourse. It incorporates two qualitative methodologies. Textual and critical analyses of columns will reveal not only when and what racial themes appear in the texts, but also how the columns discuss race. Then in-depth elite interviews with the columnists will be conducted to learn which factors influence their writing.

This study does not hinge on whether black columnists conform to mainstream values, even if and especially when they talk about race. They are embedded with the same professional values of fellow newsroom staffers, and columnists usually gain independence by first thriving within rigid newsroom routinization. So the study centers on the parameters for and the methods used by black columnists to talk about race, the way they use language to convey the black experience to readers of all races. In a recent column about *Lee Daniels' The Butler*, Pitts (2013, August 8) does not identify himself as a black man but forcefully alludes to his standpoint and the perspective it gives him:

> Black men hang from a tree like dead leaves. And that is The Truth. A black man must watch his wife led away by a white man to be raped and there is nothing he can do about this act of psychological castration except endure it. And that is The Truth. (2013, August 8)

As the preceding example illustrates, the work of black columnists in the 21st century is best understood through the history of race in America as well as the history of

racial discourse in America. The following chapters will explain the lasting significance of Du Bois' "double consciousness" and his articulation of African Americans as the "problem people," a label with enduring consequences. It will point out other relevant racial concepts. The chapter then will examine the Black Press, the role of the Hutchins and Kerner commissions in shaping the news industry's approach to race, and the ways media sociology theorizes about race in news coverage and production. The literature then will turn to column writing, a history of black columnists, and a little-known association of black columnists. The literature also places framing theory within column writing as well as race and communication.

This dissertation seeks to examine how elite black columnists balance the need to rely on "personal perspective" with their obligation to be "truth tellers – literary private eyes working for the public good" (Avlon, Angelo, & Louis, 2011, p. 15). In terms of race, what is personal, what is telling the truth, and what is the public good? While Max Lerner (1959) described the relationship between a columnist and his audience as "an intensely close and personal one" in which the columnist is seen "as companion, commentator, guide, friend, even psychiatrist" (Silvester, 1997, p. xiv), a more complex dynamic may be at work for black columnists, even among the most elite. As *The Washington Post's* Courtland Milloy put it, he and his fellow black columnists "get paid a lot of money to provoke or … to provide ourselves with self-therapy, to disturb the peace, and by and large, we get paid by white people to disturb white people's peace" (Nieman, 1993).

Chapter 2: Race and News

African American columnists not only face the circumstances of being black in America but also often articulate the experience to readers of all colors. Their writing about race is expected to be deeply rooted in the historical role that discourse has played in shaping and mis-shaping black America. The axiom "giving voice to the voiceless" is an age-old undertaking for black journalists. But their work in mainstream newsrooms has taken place only in the last half-century. The struggle for fair representation in American media and the emergence of black American journalists are best understood through the concepts of double-consciousness and narrative identity; the history of Black Press, and two historic critiques of American journalism that influenced mainstream's media racial coverage.

DOUBLE CONSCIOUSNESS AS THEORY

At its simplest, "double consciousness" is the term W. E. B. Du Bois used to described the fractured psyche of turn-of-the-20th century black Americans, who possessed "[t]wo souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder" (Gates, 2003). However, contemporary African-Americans can relate to John Edgar Wideman's initial response to *The Souls of Black Folk* passage about "twoness" and similarly coming away with his "great sense of relief. My experience was being validated" (1990, p. xii). Du Bois' concept of "double-consciousness" is the founding formulation of black American identity, one that has remained relevant for more than 100 years since the

publication of *The Souls of Black Folk* in 1903. His exploration of double-consciousness and The Veil of segregation highlight The Other's dynamics of presence/absence and inside/outside (Seidman, 2013, p. 309).

In an 1883 speech, Frederick Douglass described how "the color line" stifled the black American and "shuts him out from all respectable and profitable trades and callings." Two decades later, the world listened when Du Bois, a philosopher turned sociologist, claimed that the problem of the new century was the color line, the modern divisive issue of race. It imposed a metaphorical and physical Veil (racism and segregation) on its oppressed citizens of color. They are left with a psychic double-consciousness in navigating the "land of the free" with only the barest crumbs of that freedom. *The Souls of Black Folk,* a collection of original and revised essays, is Du Bois' personal and critical analysis of the black experience. This is the struggle of "an intellectual" and "a race champion," the latter perhaps caused by the inability to fully be the former (Posnock, 1998, p. 9). Other dualities abound: the plural *Souls* in the title, the chapter introductions pairing white poets with Negro spirituals, the contrast between enlightened Germany and the oppressive Black Belt.

Influential scholar Cornel West (1997) calls Du Bois "the brook of fire through which we all must pass in order to gain access to the intellectual and political weaponry needed" to combat American racism (p. 55). In fact *The Souls of Black Folk* "posits the founding metaphor of the Veil and the founding concept of double-consciousness" to create "an ontology of blackness upon which is grounded the Black American literary

tradition" (Adell, 1994, p. 11). It makes clear that modernity, with nationalist discourses, and race "are indissolubly linked" (Zamir, 2008, p. 1). Henry Louis Gates Jr. (2007) adds that Du Bois was explaining a black culture that had been "born in the chaos of slavery" and was beginning "to generate a richly variegated body of plots, stories, melodies, and rhythms":

> Du Bois peered closely at the culture of his kind, and saw the face of Black America. Actually, he saw two faces. He described this condition as 'double consciousness,' and his emphasis on a fractured psyche made *Souls* a harbinger of the modernist movement that would begin to flower a decade or so later in Europe and America (p. xiii).

With their pleas for liberation, Sojourner Truth and Frederick Douglass previously sought to end slavery; Du Bois hoped to transcend its debilitating afterlife since the collapse of the Reconstruction. Without irony, Du Bois built upon Hegel's master-slave relationship of consciousness to create a new identification of a black and tragic self. It is unclear why he chose the phrase "double consciousness," which used by Emerson in an 1843 lecture titled "The Transcendentalist" and in psychiatry as a precursor to bipolar disorder.

The opening chapter of *The Souls of Black Folk*, "Of Our Spiritual Strivings," was revised from an essay Du Bois had written for *Atlantic Monthly* in 1897. Even though Du Bois resonates most deeply with blacks, this pivotal chapter is written to a white audience. In "Strivings," he explained the predicament of his people:

> The Negro is … born with a veil, and gifted with second-sight in this American world, -- a world which yields him no true self-consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world. It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in

> amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his two-ness, – an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder (p. 9).

That "twoness" is a sensation of neither/nor – neither wholly black nor fully American – rather than one of "either/or," that exacts a psychic toll African Americans have yet to shake even after achieving *de jure* political equality in the mid 20th century. It is inherently knowing that the way whites see blacks is an illusion, a distortion, and one that reflects back on them; it is manifested in behavior and perceptions, strategic and culturally bred. The black American endures "a double life, with double thoughts, double duties and double social classes" that also frame his discourse – "double words, double ideals." Du Bois, then still a firm believer in American ideals, warned that this damaged yet undiagnosed psyche must "tempt the mind to pretense or revolt, hypocrisy or to radicalism" (p. 146).

Du Bois' desire to be a "co-worker in the kingdom of culture" is not just a counter to Booker T. Washington's less ambitious goals for their people but to "make it possible for a man to be both a Negro and a American without being cursed," and in the process creating an identity that is neither national nor racial but universalist (Posnock, 1998, p. 87). And despite criticism that double consciousness is a symptom of those wanting to be white, Du Bois claimed that the black man "would not bleach his Negro soul in a flood of white Americanism, for he knows that Negro blood has a message for the world" (p. 9). In fact "double consciousness" is a gift, an ability to see through the veil in ways that racist white America cannot, an idea that Richard Wright would extend to his

conceptualization of "double vision." As important as the pain of invisibility is the gift of self-recognition that "forms the essential basis for action and struggle. In this way, the alienation outlined by Du Bois has "revolutionary potential" (Holt, 1990, p. 305).

Du Bois, who died at age 95, lived long enough to antagonize a who's who of political and literary black leaders. In America, he switched political allegiances; having renounced his American citizenship, he died in Ghana the day before the March on Washington in 1963. Gates Jr. (2007) contends that as a theory of racial identity, double-consciousness "has come to have a life of its own" especially by those who wish to theorize a counter-identity (p. xv). Useful for this research, Gooding-Williams contends that Du Bois saw double consciousness as an analytical tool with three objectives: "for examining African American's felt, subjective experience of the Negro problem; for analyzing the failings of African American political leadership; and for articulating the ethical aims of the politics of self-realization" (2009, p. 283).

The concept of double-consciousness has woven its way through almost every aspect of the enslaved or colonized psyche on both sides of the Atlantic (Gilroy, 1995; Holt, 1990). Malcolm thought it was self-defeating to think in terms of a consciousness that relies on black identity being seen through whiteness (Gates &West, 1996). Other blacks reject it as a symptom of the black bourgeoisie, especially in tandem with Du Bois' aspirations for Black America's elite, whom he called the Talented Tenth (Asante, 1993; Gates & West, 1996). Postmodernists call it obsolete in a multicultural, global world (Gilroy, 1995).

But black journalists evoke double-consciousness to explain their professional lives. Pamela Newkirk (2000), whose seminal book on blacks in white newsrooms is titled *Within the Veil,* uses Du Bois' two-ness passage as an epigram to a chapter on African-American journalists ostracized in the black community (p. 136). Unlike the leeway given to the Black Press, the loyalties and motives of even reformist black journalists in the mainstream media "are immediately suspect, given their ties to an institution that has historically denigrated" the black community (Newkirk, p. 137). Black columnists approach writing as being of two minds, two identities. According to Les Payne, a former columnist and influential member of the National Association of Black Journalists:

> On the one hand, you want to talk to Black people. On the other hand you want to talk to White folks. So if you offend one, you soothe the other. If you soothe one, you offend the other. That's the kind of duality and the conflict of those two opposing realities, it's something that the Black journalist faces, and it's hard for them to figure out (Muhammad, 2004).

Asked in person if double-consciousness played a role in how black columnists approach their task, Eugene Robinson of *The Washington Post*, winner of the 2009 Pulitzer for commentary, replied: "Absolutely!"[1]

'THE PROBLEM PEOPLE'

Du Bois opens *The Souls of Black Folk* by noting that as a black man he is frequently asked: "How does it feel to be a problem?" (p. 7). Yet before the turn of the

[1] Personal communication, October 9, 2013.

20th century, Douglass had tried to steer the discussion about black America away from such rhetoric:

> The American people have fallen in with the bad idea that this is a Negro problem, a question of character of the Negro and not a question of nation. It is still more surprising that the colored press of the country and some of our colored orators have made the same mistakes and still insist upon calling it a 'Negro problem,' or a race problem. ... Now, there is nothing the matter with the Negro whatever; he is all right. Learned or ignorant, he is all right. [2]

Douglass emphasized the last point: "It is not the negro, educated or illiterate, intelligent or ignorant, who is on trial, or whose qualities are giving trouble to the nation."

Yet, while *The Souls of Black Folk* introduced double-consciousness as a foundational theory for black psyche, it also helped cement "The Negro Problem" as the leading analytical framework for American race relations, and it remains the way the news media approach Black America – as a problem needing repair or best ignored because it had become entrenched. Rayford W. Logan, a historian and member of Roosevelt's "black cabinet," wrote in *What the Negro Wants* (1944) that the Negro problem "is today a national problem spawned from two hundred forty years of slavery and the northward migration of Negroes incident to two world wars. It is our number one domestic failure and our number one international handicap" (p.1). In the same book, influential columnist George S. Shuyler agreed in principle, but not semantically: "For while there is actually no Negro problem, there is definitely a Caucasian problem. Continual reference to a Negro problem assumes that some profound difficulty has been

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[2] Cited from Kevin Kelly Gaines, *Uplifting the Race: Black Leadership, Politics, and Culture in the Twentieth Century*. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), p. 67.

or is being created for the human race by the so-called Negroes. This is typical ruling class arrogance" (p. 281).

Gunnar Myrdal's landmark study *America Dilemma* (1944), subtitled "The Negro Problem & Modern Democracy," devotes chapters to the moral, political, and cultural issue of treating American blacks as second-class citizens in the so-called greatest democracy in the world. While he calls the problem "embarrassing," his language and that of Du Bois' evolved to a mediated assumption that blacks have a problem that is self-inflected. This linguistic ambiguity led the influential activist Dorothy I. Height to declare: "We are not a problem people; we are a people with problems." A *New York Times* review praised Ellison's *Shadow and Act* for containing "reminiscences and opinions which are personal without being merely nostalgic and highly intelligent without being locked within the rhetoric of The Problem" (Elliott, 1964).

But after Patrick Moynihan's widely disseminated Report on the Negro Family (1965), the problems of blackness worsened to being a "tangle of pathology." The report said that there was "no very satisfactory way, at present, to measure social health or social pathology" within an ethnic community, but it labeled black urban America as damaged and potentially dangerous. *The New York Review of Books* pointed out that the report's "guiding assumption is that social pathology is caused less by basic defects in the social system than by defects in particular individuals and groups which prevent their adjusting to the system. The prescription is therefore to change the deviants, not the system" (Jencks, 1965). But social scientists as well as journalists began to assume a state

of pathology, and the discourse was cemented (Cohen, 2010).

Such influential African-Americans as psychiatrist Kenneth Clarke embraced the rhetoric of pathology as a means to end segregationist policies like separate-but-equal education (Scott, 1997). While the effort worked in the 1950s, their tactic encouraged the discourse of "damage" pathology, in which the black American could be seen as wounded psychologically, socially, and culturally – essentially viewed with "contempt and pity," to use Du Bois' words. Conservatives co-opted "damage pathology" to press their own policies based on the fact that blacks could not be repaired (Scott, 1997).

The white news media readily referenced "pathology" to explain the problems of black urban life, and it quickly became a stereotypical crutch for reporting on blacks and urban issues. Black journalists hired in the 1970s soon discovered that their newsrooms preferred articles under the umbrella term black pathology, the journalistic lens for stories about black America that focused on chronic crime, drug abuse, welfare, poor housing conditions, and unwed mothers (Gandy, 1997; Newkirk, 2000).

RACIAL FORMATION AND RACIAL PROJECTS

The continued significance of double-consciousness illustrates how sharply Du Bois pinpointed the psychic struggles of black America. At the same time, the stubbornness of the "problem people" frame – exemplified by the images inside the Superdome and of "looting" in New Orleans following Katrina in 2005 – expose the limitations of double-consciousness to steer public policy and opinion, especially with assumed equality in the late 20th and early 21st centuries. The color line was still drawn

and state-assisted, but theorizing about its role in today's racial discourse requires a complementary approach.

The researcher turned to Omi and Winant's (2014) conceptualization of racial formation and racial projects, which explain America's historical yet evolving necessity for race-consciousness and racism. As they first wrote in their 1986 preface, "Race will always be at the center of the American experience" (1994, p. 5). Two subsequent editions and the election of the first African-American president led them to a new, stronger claim: "We regard race as a master category of oppression and resistance in the United States" (2014, p. 245). They argue that race has been a "template for patterns of inequality, marginalization, and difference throughout U.S. history":

> We are not suggesting that race has been primordial or primary, or that it has operated as some sort of "fundamental contradiction." Rather we are emphasizing its ubiquity: its presence and importance. We are noting that no other social conflict — not class, not sex/ gender, not colonialism or imperialism— can ever be understood independently of it. (2014, p. viii)

A "new and better understanding of race," they contend, "would recognize that the race concept's meaning is being made and remade from moment to moment" (Omi & Winant, 2014, p. 264). This better understanding can be achieved through racial formation theory, which they define as "the *sociohistorical process by which racial identities are created, lived out, transformed, and destroyed*" (2014, p. 109, their italics). All these are possible because "[t]he racial instability that has characterized the whole of American history continues unabated. The unsettled meaning of race, and the continuing elusiveness of a genuine, substantive racial democracy in the United States, presents the country with both

countless problems and limitless opportunities" (2014, p. 16). At the core of the theory, race is not an objective biological or phenotypical classification and race is not ideological mask for such issues as class (Shah & Thornton, 2004, p. 15). It is a social construct, and racial categories "are established and employed to mobilize specific meanings and accomplish certain social and political goals" (Shah & Thornton, 2004, p. 15). Thus laws that result in longer jail time for crimes associated with the black underclass are the latest strategic and political tool in race-consciousness and racism. At the same time, though not as systemically, so is the decision of young African-Americans to take to social media and the streets to demand justice for Trayvon Martin (Omi & Winant, 2014, p. 125). Both efforts, one despotic and the other democratic, are what Omi and Winant call racial projects: "*simultaneously an interpretation, representation, or explanation of racial identities and meanings, and an effort to organize and distribute resources (economic, political, cultural) along particular racial lines*" (2014, p. 125, their italics). This engagement with agency, both oppressive and progressive, makes racial formation theory a more appealing concept for this research than critical race theory, which is also invaluable in exposing racism in its various guises and employs storytelling techniques.

But by connecting the mediated or ideological meaning of race to racially organized social structures and everyday experiences, racial projects attempt to both "shape the ways in which social structures are racially signified and the ways that racial meanings are embedded in social structures" (Omi & Winant, 2014, p. 125). Take, for

instance, the important rhetoric of colorblindness. Unlike blacks, whites find racism in color consciousness and its absence is colorblindness (Omi & Winant, 1994, p. 70). Colorblindness used to be "a call for racial equality and inclusion," Omi and Winant contend. "Today, it is largely an ideological framework for the effacement of race consciousness" (1994, p. 70). Colorblindness is a hegemonic racial ideology that has to be enforced not only court decisions and government policy but also in popular culture and everyday life. The conservative rhetorical effort to de-emphasize racial equality while simultaneously striving for color-blindness is a racial project of "rearticulation" – or the "the *ideological appropriation of elements of an opposing position*" (Omi & Winant, 2014, p. 264, their italics). As the same time, the impromptu effort of black columnists to call "color-blindness" rhetoric spurious can be seen as its own racial project.

The concept of racial formation has been called one of the most influential theories in contemporary social science, even by those who find fault with elements of Omi and Winant's conceptualization (Feagin & Alias, 2012). Researchers have found merit in investigating racial projects in communication settings. The news media found power in racially depicting interethnic conflict in America (Shah & Thornton, 2004). Court documents and public comments of a sexual assault case revealed the University of Colorado's longstanding racial project to put its white students ahead of any claims of African American athletes (Crosset, 2007). This research will incorporate an understanding of racial projects in analyzing the work of black columnists.

THE BLACK NARRATIVE AND NARRATIVE IDENTITY

How does knowing black America's past shape the columnists' articulation of the present and future? Concepts outside of journalism studies provide a framework for such research: the black narrative, narrative identity and narrative unity. Amoah (1997), who capitalizes Narrative to elevate the concept from simply being a genre or style of writing, explains that Narrative, or storytelling, is "deeply rooted" in African American culture:

> It is a tradition based on the continuity of wisdom, and it functions to assert the voice of the oppressed. Storytelling is not merely a means of entertainment. It is also an educational tool, and for many, it is a way of life. For others, it is the only way to comprehend, analyze, and deal with life. (p. 84).

Long used in critical race theory and legal scholarship to make sense of racism outside of its legal parameters, narrative allows oppressed people to reclaim their own voices and "their own sphere of theorized existence" – separate from the marginalized position where the dominant society has relegated them (Amoah, 1997, p. 85).

To the writer and scholar Charles Johnson (2008), the black narrative is "a very old narrative, one we all know quite well":

> It is a tool we use, consciously or unconsciously, to interpret or make sense of everything that has happened to black people in this country since the arrival of the 20 Africans at the Jamestown colony in 1619. (p. 33)

He explains that the conflict of the narrative is "slavery, then segregation and legal disenfranchisement. The meaning of the story is group victimization" (2008, p. 33). But Johnson saw the rise of candidate Obama and wondered whether the black narrative, which he boldly calls ahistorical and ideological, was coming to an end? To many, the

answer was no, with at least one dissenter claiming that the Civil Rights Movement, which has a exalted place in the narrative, had already subsumed the victimization trope (Watts, 2008). But Stewart (2011), who is interested in how Obama's election upset the black American male narrative, interprets Johnson to make this relevant observation about the black American narrative: "We see 'ourselves' in certain ways as a result of the stories we tell, in other words, but other people see 'us' in certain ways as a result of the stories they tell about us. These stories have the potential to be hegemonic or counter-hegemonic, depending on the story's teller" (p. 249).

Two other concepts, narrative identity and narrative unity, are also germane as ways of understanding how black Americans live in the present mindful of the past, and specifically how African American columnists might discuss race through stories of the black American experience.

McAdams (2011), a seminal scholar in the field, defines narrative identity as:

> [T]he internalized and evolving story of the self that a person constructs to make sense and meaning out of his or her life. The story is a selective reconstruction of the autobiographical past and a narrative anticipation of the imagined future that serves to explain, for the self and others, how the person came to be and where his or her life may be going. (p. 99)

Its current roots are in psychoanalysis, but narrative identity emerged as a valid social scientific concept in the 1980s (McAdams, 2011). Riceour (1984) saw the narrative as the individual at play with his/her interactions, always under revision until the story ends. It has theorized the formation of organizational identities (Brown, Humphries, and Gurney, 2005) and geographical identities (Gutting, 1996). Central for

this research, narrative identity is concerned with how individuals socially construct their world through meaning, knowledge and reality, a perspective that "is congruent with the traditional African American worldview" (Gallia & Pines, 2009, p. 51). Gallia and Pines (2009) found a positive role for spirituality within the narrative identity of African American cancer survivors.

Narrative identity embraces but is broader than collective memory, in which individuals remember events they never experienced first hand because of their membership in groups (Halbwachs, 1992). Burdened by the present, the individual and the group are connected nostalgically and voluntarily.

African Americans, however, often turn to the (painful) past to make sense of the (suspect) present. Unlike collective memory, narrative identity is dependent on forming one's own stories. As Appiah (2010) points out, African Americans "often engage oppositional narratives of self-construction in the face of racism" (p. 23). Unlike collective identity, the emphasis in narrative identity is, obviously, on the stories that people make and tell about themselves. Appiah (2010) does find a collective role within narrative identity, stressing that "one thing that matters to people across many societies is a certain narrative unity, the ability to tell a story of one's life that hangs together":

> The story — my story— should cohere in the way appropriate to a person in my society. It need not be the exact same story, from week to week, or year to year, but how it fits into the wider story of various collectivities matters for most of us. (2010, p. 23)

McAdams (2011) argues that by combining "a selective reconstruction of the past and an imagined scenario for the future," narrative identity "integrates a life in time and culture"

(p. 111). This research will examine whether the black columnists can be seen as relying on a black narrative or constructing a narrative identity of the black American experience, one that leans on history and biography — not so much to impose a collective memory on black Americans, but to use stories that make sense of what it means to be black in America.

THE BLACK PRESS

The "problem people" framework, articulated by Douglass and DuBois and a stubborn trope in contemporary journalism, is one reason mainstream news media historically shaped news through an 'us' vs. 'them' perspective in which the white patriarchal perspective holds the position of power and subjectivity and African Americans are branded as the inferior and/or threatening 'them' (Larson, 2006; Ferguson, 1998, van Dijk, 1996).

In fact, the American Black Press developed in the 1800s from an urgent necessity to counter those standpoints. It was not intended to substitute for black participation in the majority media but to encourage discussion on common concerns and to correct misrepresentations in other public arenas (Jacobs, 2000, p. 29). However the Black Press did much more, becoming a powerful instrument of change in America. Clarence Page (2006), who in 1989 became the first black columnist to win a Pulitzer for commentary and whose work is examined here, asserts that the Black Press not only recorded black history but also made it happen (p. xii). Black newspapers transformed disenfranchised and dispersed African Americans into a community, and played a

powerful role in eradicating black illiteracy (Washburn, 2006). There were political and social victories, including Ida B. Wells' campaign to end lynching; *The Chicago Defender*'s promotion of the Great Migration, and *The Pittsburgh Courier*'s Double-V campaign, which bolstered black support of World War II while securing steps toward integration on American soil, most notably in factories, the military, and professional baseball (Pride & Wilson, 1997; Washburn, 2006).

The earliest black newspapers were products of such common spaces as churches for Northern freedmen, allied by their exclusion from other public spheres (Jacobs, 2000, p. 35). In the decades leading to the Civil War, the Northern press usually sensationalized, ignored, or lied about issues relevant to enslaved and free blacks, who in turn were unambiguously stereotyped and vilified (Washburn, 2006; Pride & Wilson, 1997). Mainstream newspapers that were against slavery relied on white political leaders to make their case; white abolitionist publications, which initially depended on black readership, soon did the same (Jacobs, 2000, pp. 34 and 36). As the 1820 census faithfully documented the number of people of African descent on American soil – with 233,000 free blacks and 1.5 million slaves comprising 16% of the total population – mediated discussions about black Americans, racist or sympathetic, took place without black voices. They were among the counted but not among the heard.[3]

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[3] In the first chapter of Ralph Ellison's posthumous book *Juneteenth*, a character named Reverend Hicks leads some elderly blacks to a senator's office at the Capitol. The senator's secretary asks: "Constituents?" " 'No, miss, he said, 'the Senator doesn't even have anybody like us in his state. We're from down where we're among the counted but not among the heard.' "

The black elite, using a free press as a means to an end, enlisted in the mediated battle for emancipation and equality. These leaders, especially Frederick Douglass, saw a national Black Press serving three crucial needs: provide a black forum for debate and advancement; increase black visibility in white society; and monitor the distrusted white press (Jacobs, 2000, p. 37). In 1827, the year New York became the last Northern state to free its slaves, America's first black-owned newspaper was founded in lower Manhattan. "We wish to plead our own cause," publishers Samuel Cornish and John B. Russwurm wrote in the inaugural issue of *Freedom's Journal*. "Too long have others spoken for us."

The weekly lasted only two years, but its eloquent first-person argument became the paradigm for the Black Press, its pronoun use signifying an explicitly black presence in journalism. Twenty-five black newspapers were established before or at the time of the Civil War; by 1910, over 275 such papers helped form black America into a community (Nelson, 1999). By 1921, there were 492 around the country (Washburn, 2006, p. 121). By then, a few mainstream newspapers started and (inevitably dropped) columns or editions exclusively for their black communities, providing daily if non-controversial information that the black weeklies could not supply (Pride & Wilson, 1997, p. 129). But in the first half of the 20th century, black ministers and black newspapers in the north and south had the most influence on African Americans, the latter having the most power "because a single paper could speak to a far larger audience every week than a preacher could, particularly since readership was much more than circulation. Each issue was passed around avidly from teacher to reader" (Washburn, 2006, p. 6). One newspaper

copy might be read by a hundred people; every literate black *actually* read a black newspaper (Washburn, 2006; p. 50 and p. 121; Pride & Wilson, 1997).

More than a conduit for accurate and pertinent news, the opinionated Black Press was a widely circulated instrument for advocacy and frank commentary about the black experience, usually practicing a "powerful and compelling form of advocacy journalism" (Washburn, 2006, p. 8). It did not attempt to be objective "because it didn't see the white press being objective. It often took a position. It had an attitude" (Nelson, 1999). The editor of the ubiquitous *Pittsburgh Courier*, which at its height in the 1940s had a circulation of more than 350,000 and 21 editions, called the black reporter "a fighting partisan" in the war for equal rights, armed "atomic adjectives and nouns" and invented similes and metaphors "that lay open the foe's weaknesses" (Washburn, 2006, p. 9) *The Courier's* Double V campaign attracted 220,000 card-carrying members and became a "nationwide battle cry" for blacks' rights (Washburn, 2006, p. 4; Pride & Wilson, 1997).

Especially in its earliest years, the Black Press served as a printed dais for such political leaders as Douglass, whose *North Star* (1847) increased his demand as a public speaker (Wilson, p. 1991, p. 37); Booker T. Washington, who supported several newspapers that voiced his accommodationist stance; and Marcus Garvey and his *Negro World*. Du Bois thought he could do more for race relations through the media than through political action. In 1910, he founded *the Crisis*, ostensibly the NAACP's house organ but in reality Du Bois' one-man brand of militant journalism (Rudwick, 1958; Marable, 1986). Perhaps more so than *The Souls of Black Folk*, Du Bois became known

to Black America with his commentary in *The Crisis*, which was regarded "reverently" in Negro homes (Rudwick, 1958, p. 215). The monthly magazine included pieces by black literary figures as well as Du Bois' "clear, sharp, and dramatic" editorials that frequently railed against whites (Rudwick, 1958, pp. 216-217). Circulation reached about 100,000 in 1918 and 1919 (Marable, 1986; Rudwick, 1958). Du Bois constantly warred with the NAACP over the control over *Crisis* content and antagonized such would-be allies as the Black Press and black and white churches; he left the *Crisis* and the NAACP in 1934 as the magazine struggled with financial and circulation losses (Rudwick, 1958). During its heyday, Du Bois' commentary – centered on the relationship between American democracy and American racism – was written for the northern Talented Tenth, his phrase for the black elite, but was widely read across the country, including by whites (Marable, 1986, p. 76; Rudwick, 1958).

At the *Crisis* and the more traditional Black Press, news was paired with strivings. Black journalists covered lynchings and race riots from the black perspective while commentators urged black Americans to uplift the race (Pride & Wilson, 1997; Nelson, 1999; Washburn, 2006; Rudwick, 1958). Although few white Americans knew of the Black Press, top officials in Washington (and in particular J. Edgar Hoover) read its newspapers and feared its clout among its readers. Sedition charges were leveled against some black publications rooted in Communist causes. During wartimes, editors were threatened with sedition after pointing out the hypocrisy of blacks' fighting for freedom abroad (Nelson, 1999, Pride & Wilson, 1997; Washburn, 2006). The papers that were

spared had publishers whose racial discourse was shaped by business aspirations. These capitalists had a mainstream message: they hated white racism, not white people (Washburn, 2006, p. 119)

Robert S. Abbott founded *The Chicago Defender* in 1905, and by 1920 was the most powerful black man in America (Pride & Wilson, 1997; Nelson, 1999). *The Defender* is often credited with boosting the Great Migration because of its stream of articles and columns extolling the economic and cultural virtues of Northern life and its elaborate distribution system down South, despite unconstitutional steps some towns took to suppress black newspapers. Also based in Chicago were The Associated Negro Press and Johnson Publishing, the parent company of *The Negro Digest*, *Jet*, and *Ebony*, must-read publications that were more meaningful to black America than *Reader's Digest* and *Look* were for white readers (Green, 2007). After debate among its staff, *Jet* ran photographs of the open casket of Emmett Till, a 14-year-old from Chicago who was brutally killed by two whites in Mississippi. Till's murder case would mark the first time the mainstream media en masse covered the oppressive Jim Crow South. The trial of his accused murderers spurred the white news media "to move beyond the relatively safe terrain of a Supreme Court decision to consider the violent underbelly of racism," with more articles written about the Till case than another story involving an African American in the previous five years of mainstream coverage (Rhodes, 2006, p. 45; Roberts & Klibanoff, 2008).

Major newspapers and television networks soon saw the journalistic and moral value of covering the emerging Civil Rights Movement. News consumers of all colors turned to mainstream media for deadline news on such pivotal events as the Little Rock Nine who integrated Little Rock's Central High in 1957, the March on Washington in 1963, and the violent Selma marches in 1965. The black-owned newspapers, usually produced weekly, struggled to keep up. The mainstream press basked in the praise it had received from civil rights leaders for advancing their cause (Rhodes, 2006; Bond, 2001). But after a century-plus of advocacy, the Black Press legitimately could claim some credit when President Lyndon Johnson signed the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which prohibited discrimination on the basis of race, color, religion, sex or national origin. In 1965, he signed the Voting Rights Act, which struck down state laws disenfranchising black voters in the South. Five days after the voting act became law, the news media discovered a Los Angeles neighborhood called Watts, where seemingly out of the blue, the frustrations of the black urban underclass had erupted in rioting (Jacobs, 2000, p. 5; Edy, 2006). Crucially, the Black Press provided the needed context about the causes of the unrest, but by then had become an endangered afterthought in shaping white thought on black issues (Jacobs, 2000). The representation of black power and a more mediated, complex African America had been mostly left in the hands of white, mainstream media.

Other factors threatened its relevance to a diversified black America. For more than a hundred years, black publishers depended on circulation rather than advertising for most of their revenue and had been editorially outspoken about the ills of white America

– within the hegemonic and legal limits set by capitalism and Hoover's zealous sense of justice. In the mid-1960s, many newspapers became less outspoken to keep the few white advertisers they had finally attracted (Pride & Wilson, 1997).

In 1968, after rioting in ghettoes across the country had dominated the evening news and alarmed black and white leaders, the Kerner Commission's Report on Civil Unrest echoed the initial editorial of *Freedom's Journal* some 140 years earlier by finding that the mainstream media "report and write from a standpoint of white man's world" (p. 366). One obvious solution was the integration of white print and broadcast newsrooms. After Kerner, the news media industry hired blacks straight from college and from the Black Press, stripping the latter of newsroom talent. These journalists believed in the mission of the Black Press but sought the higher pay and craved the higher profile that the mainstream press provided, whatever the cultural cost. Washburn (2006) contends that connection between the decline of the Black Press and widespread integration (especially in media content and production) is often overstated (p. 200). But there is no dispute that the Black Press, once a viable cog in the American news industry, began its steep decline by the end of the 1960s.

Jacobs (2000) asserts that the Black Press, despite its lack of resources, remains a necessary public sphere for black expression, providing crucial counternarratives to the mainstream coverage of riots in Los Angeles, in Watts and South Central, and following the Rodney King verdict. The black perspective on news and culture has a prominent place online even if ownership is in white hands: for instance, *Huffington Post's* Black

Voices, *The Washington Post's* The Root, NPR's Code Switch and NBC's The Grio. And high-profile black editors who had worked in mainstream newsrooms are returning to the Black Press, adding needed experience and luster (Newkirk, 2011). Layoffs and buyouts prompted some of the moves, "others by disillusionment with mainstream journalism or a desire to delve more deeply into African-American issues" (Newkirk, 2011). But the reverse migration of black executives and editors means that less of a black perspective is being advanced in mainstream newsrooms; there are literally fewer blacks at the table where key editorial decisions are being made. The Black Press' (temporary) gain is likely a greater loss for readers of all colors (Newkirk, 2011).

THE HUTCHINS COMMISSION

The Black Press grew out of the need for African Americans to speak for themselves. While the mainstream press had occasionally covered court rulings on integration in the 1940s, it had little interest in enlisting black journalists. To best understand the evolution of mainstream media's slow embrace of fairer representation and even slower attempt at newsroom integration requires examinations of the Hutchins Commission Report (1944-47) and the Kerner Commission Report (1967-68), the most prominent documents critiquing the American news media. The Hutchins Report is repeatedly cited in research as the first major document to acknowledge racial inequality in the news media; Kerner offered a working blueprint to fix it. The story behind both documents sheds light on the news media's pursuit of fair racial representation and why black columnists might be seen as a necessary yet convenient way of covering race.

Separated by just two decades, Hutchins and Kerner were products of two tumultuous eras shaped by the formidable mediated culture of their day. Scholars in the Hutchins Commission challenged the libertarian press and dared to discuss race when mainstream media were firmly racist. Politicians and executives in the Kerner Commission urgently diagnosed the causes of urban rioting, faulting the broadcast and print industry for ignoring the plight of the ghetto dweller and the white racism that kept him there. Hutchins conceptualized the journalistic ethos of a "free and responsible press," while Kerner dramatically warned that America was "moving toward two societies, one black and one white – separate and unequal." What remains significant about these reports is not only their stated concerns and remedies, but also the media reaction to them and the industry's willingness to take the suggestions to heart.

The Hutchins Commission was formed when the parameters of freedom of the press faced cultural and constitutional challenges. Exposés of press excesses were common, as were charges that newspapers, in particular, were abusing their constitutional armor (Blanchard, 1977; Bates, 1995; Blevins, 1997). The courts began to treat the press as any other industry subject to government regulation and redefined freedom of the press "as a right of the people to obtain information necessary for survival in a rapidly changing world, not as a right of publishers to operate without consideration of people's needs" (Blanchard, 1997, p. 4).

In this atmosphere, the Commission on Freedom of the Press hoped to clarify the intersection of press freedom and democracy. Time magazine editor and publisher Henry

R. Luce and University of Chicago President Robert Hutchins, classmates at Yale, both sat on the board of the Encyclopedia Britannica. During a 1942 board meeting, Luce passed a note to Hutchins asking: "How do I find out about the freedom of the press and what my obligations are?" (Bates, 1995, p. 3). Because Hutchins did not know, Luce recommended that they set up a commission on freedom of the press. Hutchins chose "an impressive collection of leading figures in law, economics, social history, philosophy and theology" – but, to ensure objectivity, no newsmen (Blanchard, 1977, p. 12). The thirteen active members, including the communications studies pioneer Harold Lasswell, distrusted the press.

In 1947, the commission released *A Free and Responsible Press: A General Report on Mass Communication: Newspapers, Radio, Motion Pictures, Magazines and Books*. Newspaper journalists had already complained about being lumped with non-news media even though they received the brunt of the criticism. The commissioners centered the report on "the responsibilities of the owners and managers of the press to their consciences and the common good for the formation of public opinion" (p. vi).[4]

The commission determined that the modern press was "a new phenomenon" caught in a "present crisis" (pp. 2-3). In outlining the requirements that society deserved from its press, the Hutchins Commission stressed the difference between contemporary news media and their libertarian predecessors: the press was now essential to the

[4] Unnamed citations refer to the 1947 University of Chicago Press hardback *Free and Responsible Press*.

operation and economy of the country and was responsible for a greater quantity and quality of information.

It opened dramatically: "The Commission set out to answer the question: Is the freedom of the press in danger? Its answer to the question is: Yes." The press had become more important, but people had less opportunity to express their opinion through the media. Media executives did not adequately provide for "the needs of society." As such, society would "inevitably" seek regulation because the press engaged in practices that society "condemns." But this threat was toothless because the divided commission did not suggest more restrictive measures against the press (Bates, 1995). Instead the report urged the press to embrace responsibility to accompany its freedom. Freedom *for* a democratic press, the commission noted, was as important as freedom *from* government restraint, especially after the United States fought its the second world war over totalitarian factions in 30 years.

Free and Responsible Press identified the basic requirements of press freedom and responsibility and the factors that prevent the press from achieving these ideals, including "tools" (technology), "structure" (organization) and "performance" (content). It offered 13 mostly ignored recommendations for the government, the press, and the people. Hutchins is more known for identifying five requirements "a free society" should demand of its press. But the commission admitted in print that it had "no idea that these five ideal demands can ever be completely met," rendering them more theoretical than practical (p. 21):

- "Truthful, comprehensive, and intelligent" account of the day's events in a meaningful context
- Forum for the exchange of comment and criticism
- A representative picture of the constituent groups in society
- Presentation and clarification of the goals and values of the society
- Full access to the day's intelligence

Racial inclusion constituted the third requirement and was mentioned in the first two, but major research on the Hutchins Committee does not include its origins in the report. The first rule is similar to Kovach and Rosenstiel's first principle of journalism: the report claims that media "should be accurate. They should not lie" (p. 21). The rule then addressed such issues as newsroom routines and a rethinking of "facts" and objectivity: "The account of an isolated fact, however accurate in itself, may be misleading and, in effect, untrue … It is no longer enough to report *the fact* truthfully. It is now necessary to report *the truth about the fact*" (p. 22, its italics). The commission brought up race and segregation:

> The country has many groups which are partially insulated from one another and which need to be interpreted to one another. Factually correct but substantially untrue true accounts of the behavior of members of one of these social islands can intensify the antagonisms of others toward them. A single incident will be accepted as a sample of group action unless the press has given a flow of information and interpretation concerning the relations between two racial groups such as to enable the reader to set a single event in its proper perspective (23).

The second ideal wanted media to be a forum, "as common carriers of public discussion" (p. 23). The commission advocated a key role for specialized media of advocacy, perhaps a nod to greater distribution of the Black Press:

> In the absence of such a combination the partially insulated groups in society will continue to be insulated. The unchallenged assumptions of each group will continue to harden into prejudice. (p. 25).

Here lies a major difference between the missions of the Kerner and Hutchins committees: The origins of this "insulation" and "isolation" spurred Kerner, which saw media as part of the problem, while Hutchins sought only to improve the standards of the press. Hutchins was more concerned with the First Amendment than the consequences of Plessy v. Ferguson, the 1896 Supreme Court ruling that legalized separate-but-equal segregation. To the Hutchins commissioners, poor racial coverage was just one of the many areas where the press was falling short.

The third obligation, explicitly racial, urged better representation because people "relate fact and opinion to stereotypes" they are exposed to in movies, comic strips, and newspaper and radio copy: "When the images they portray fail to present the social group truly, they tend to pervert judgment" (p. 26). The commission cited the stereotypical portrayal of three groups: the Chinese, the Negro, and children: "If the Negro appears in the stories published in magazines of national circulation only as servant, if children figure constantly in radio dramas as impertinent and ungovernable brats – the image of the Negro and the American child is distorted" (p. 26). The commission, hoping to lift the Du Boisian veil, "holds to the faith that if people are exposed to the inner truth of life of a particular group, they will gradually build up respect for and understanding of it" (p. 27).

The fourth requirement for "the presentation and clarification of the goals and values of the society" assumed that media were the "most powerful education instrument" (p. 27). The fifth and final goal, giving readers full access to the day's intelligence, sought to produce better-informed citizens (p. 28).

Media reaction to the report was mostly unfavorable; even Luce found it dull and simplistic (Bates, 1995). The six core requirements escaped serious question, besides being labeled idealistic and unachievable. However they became the basis of social responsibility theory in *Four Theories of the Press* (1956). Theodore Peterson, a protégé of the pioneering communication scholar Wilbur Schramm, used the report to explain the evolution of social responsibility theory from libertarian press theory. He gave newspaper publishers and editors more credit than Hutchins for understanding and embracing their responsibility to democracy and their communities. The commission's findings comprised the theory's premise: "freedom carries concomitant obligations" and has less faith in the libertarian theory (1956, p. 74). Peterson put the commission in a more positive light by stressing its distrust of governmental policy in regard to a free press, with the government's main duty being to safeguard freedom of the press. Compared with the other theories about the press – totalitarian, libertarian, and Soviet – the American press was presented as socially responsible and the country's best option.

Peterson presented four of the five commission's requirements for a democratic society as operational but was less sure about the media's commitment to representation: "In principal if not in practice, most media operators would perhaps concur with the Commission" (p. 91). He noted that "newspaper and magazine workers probably would say that this requirement is implicit in their conscientious effort to report the day's intelligence truthfully and impartially" (91). *Four Theories of the Press* was published as

the socially responsible press, as defined by Peterson, began to cover the African-American freedom struggle in the 1950s.

Scholars of race and communication consider the Hutchins Commission the first public discussion of media's failure to cover race in America but note that the report had little effect on mainstream media (Martindale, 1986, Gandy, 1998; Newkirk, 2000; Wilson, 1991).

THE KERNER COMMISSION

The 1968 Kerner Commission Report remains the main point of reference for discussing newsrooms and race, especially the media's failure to live up to its recommendations. The history of blacks in mainstream news media cannot be told without it. It is the centerpiece of Martindale's *The White Press and Black America* (1986), and is given prominence in Wilson's *Black Journalists in Paradox* (1991), Newkirk's *Within the Veil* (2000), and countless journal articles and anniversary re-assessments. These studies focus on the hostile newsroom culture that black journalists face, with an emphasis on media sociology rather than critical race theory. In that vein, Martindale (1986), prescient of Kovach and Rosenstiel's (2007) view on diversity, admits that most journalists "would shy away from the suggestion that media should deliberately undertake the task of trying to improve race relations" because doing so would counter "journalist's obligation to tell it like it is" (p. 1).

The Kerner Commission was established at the directive of President Lyndon Johnson. After the 1967 Detroit riot capped a wave of inner-city unrest, he signed an

executive order forming a bipartisan national advisory commission on civil disorders. Illinois Gov. Otto Kerner was chairman, New York Mayor John V. Lindsay was vice chairman.[5] As they stated on the report's opening page, the 11 members were directed to answer three questions: "What happened? Why did it happen? What can be done to prevent it from happening again?" They issued the report in March 1968.

President Johnson wanted to know if the mass media, with television now the country's leading news source, had played a role in the riots. (Feighery, 2009, p. 180) Journalists, also unsure if television's intrusive equipment had spurred violence, were keenly interested in the Kerner Commission's findings (Feighery, 2009, pp. 180-181). Anticipation for the report shaped the media reaction. In addition to its warning of a divided America, the commission charged:

> Segregation and poverty have created in the racial ghetto a destructive environment totally unknown to most white Americans. What white Americans have never fully understood but what the Negro can never forget -- is that white society is deeply implicated in the ghetto. White institutions created it, white institutions maintain it, and white society condones it (p. 2).[6]

Its seventeen chapters are awash in detail. The opening three chapters attempt to answer what happened, first revisiting eight cities where rioting occurred. The next six

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[5] In the introduction to the report's paperback edition, *New York Times* columnist Tom Wicker wrote that the commission usually split six-five on most decisions. Supporting the more liberal stance were Kerner, Lindsay, Oklahoma Sen. Fred Harris, Atlanta Police Chief Herbert Jenkins, and the two black members, Massachusetts Sen. Edward W. Brooke and the NAACP's Roy Wilkins; more conservative were California Rep. James Corman, Ohio Rep. William M. McCulloch, Litton Industries chairman Charles B. Thornton, United Steelworkers President I.W. Abel, and Katherine G. Peden, a Kentucky businesswoman and broadcaster.

[6] Unnamed citations refer to Bantam's 1968 paperback edition of *Report of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders*.

chapters focus on why the riots happened, supplying the kind of context that the media would be accused of neglecting: the fourth chapter analyzes black social movements from the 1920s through Black Power, and the fifth traces the history of blacks in the Western Hemisphere, starting twenty years "after Columbus reached the New World" (p. 207). Chapters address the formation of ghettoes, unemployment and family structure, and a comparison of the immigrant and black experience. In determining what can be done, the report's solutions address the relationship between police and communities, court proceedings during emergencies, compensation for damages, and the future of cities.

Among the prescriptive chapters is the one that turned the name Kerner into shorthand for newsroom diversity: Chapter 15, The Media of Mass Communications. The commissioners reiterate that Johnson had asked: "What effect do the mass media have on the riots?" The report stresses at the start of the chapter that "[f]reedom of the press is not the issue" (p. 362). Responsibility was. The report concluded that journalists had "made a real effort to give a balanced, factual account" of the riots, but had failed to "accurately reflect its scale and character," causing "an exaggeration of both mood and event" (p. 363), a transgression of Hutchins' first ideal of accuracy. The media sometimes displayed "a startling lack of common sense" (p. 377). The report found "scare headlines," statistics dependent on local officials unable or unwilling to be accurate, and misleading characterizations of a race riot when only race was involved (p. 365).

But the commission, which interviewed "ordinary citizens" and "ghetto residents," realized that solely investigating coverage of the riots was simplistic (pp. 362-

363). More consequential had been the media's "failure to report "adequately on the causes and consequences of civil disorders and the underlying problems of race relations" (p. 363). The media "report and write from the standpoint of a white man's world":

> The ills of the ghetto, the difficulties of life there, the Negro's burning sense of grievance, are seldom conveyed. Slights and indignities are part of the Negro's daily life, and many of them come from what he now calls "the white press"— a press that repeatedly, if unconsciously, reflects the biases, the paternalism, the indifference of white America. This may be understandable, but it is not excusable in an institution that has the mission to inform and educate the whole of our society (p. 366).

For media to be socially responsible, they needed to improve the coverage and representation of black Americans, poor *and* middle class, and to do so, they needed to hire minorities. At the time, there were so few that the industry did not bother to count them (Wilson & Gutiérrez, 1985, p. 160). "Tokenism," the Kerner report insisted, "is no longer enough. Negro reporters are essential, but so are Negro editors, writers and commentators" (p. 385). Nor was it enough to bemoan the lack of "qualified" Negro journalists; the media must start training them, as early as high school. Integrating newsrooms was presented as the only viable option: "If the media are to report with understanding, wisdom and sympathy on the problems of cities and the problems of the black man – for the two are increasingly intertwined – they must employ, promote and listen to Negro journalists" (p. 385).

Even though rioting followed the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. less than a month after the Kerner report was issued, Johnson considered its ideas too ambitious and ignored its recommendations; conservatives complained that individual

responsibility was underemphasized. But Kerner's "practical advice" had "its most profound influence on journalists' notions of responsibility," a vindication of sorts for the Hutchins Commission (Feighery, 2009, p. 181). A *Columbia Journalism Review* survey found that executives believed it was the media's role "to inform and educate the public about racial problems" (Martindale, 1986, p. 4). The report's hiring recommendations became the talk of journalism conferences across the country, with one editor noting: "We have police reporters, aviation editors, science editors; why not have Negro editors?" (Martindale, 1986, p. 158). Even though the commission's call for an Institute of Urban Communications never really took hold, training programs were begun for minority students and young professionals, the best known at Columbia and Berkeley. Hiring of minorities in the federally regulated broadcast industry, increased rapidly, to 10% in television news by 1982. According to the American Society of Newspaper Editors, newspaper hiring rose from less than 1% to 4% from 1968 to 1978; a decade later, minorities comprised 7% of newspaper journalists.

Newsrooms became integrated but not significantly among the all-important editing and leadership ranks (Newkirk, 2000; Wilson, 1991). Newspapers wrote more stories about blacks in the 1970s than in the 1960s, with positive pieces more commonplace, but stereotypes still prevailed (Martindale, 1986). Wilson (1991) and Newkirk (2000) contend that the coverage of blacks improved after Kerner, but the contextual journalism that the commissioners saw improving race relations was deficient. After the South Central Los Angeles rioting in 1992, journalists turned to Kerner as proof

that little had changed for the black underclass (Jacobs, 2000, p. 125). But Kerner remains the news industry's canonical text for media diversity, the paradigm on race in the newsroom. Minority group members were hired, but as the next chapter explains, their ability to change content and newsroom behavior never really materialized (Newkirk, 2000; Wilson, 1992).

Ten years after Kerner, the American Society of Newspaper Editors announced its goal of having newspaper newsrooms mirror the minority demographics of their communities by the year 2000. By 1998, before the current newspaper crisis, the effort was abandoned with minorities comprising 11% of newsroom staffs, far short of the national minority population of 30%. According to ASNE, African-American journalists held 5.5% of newsroom jobs in 2006, the peak of employment. But the organization reported that from 2001 to 2011, the number of African Americans in mainstream newspaper newsrooms plunged 34%, compared with a 0.9% decrease in the number of Asian journalists and a 8.5% decline of Latino journalists. Current Pew figures show that newspapers employ fewer than 40,000 journalists for the first time since 1978, with staffing down 30% since 2000. But minority journalists left the newsroom at a faster race. In 2012, ASNE estimated that blacks comprised 4.65% of the newspaper workforce.

Chapter 3: Race and Newsrooms

Columnists of all colors usually rise from ranks of reporter, so journalism's "objectivity" paradigm is significant in any discussion of newsroom integration. Schudson (2011) points out that while hiring more minorities and women after the Kerner Report was acceptable within the context of equal opportunity, some journalists did not think that their increased number "might or should change the nature of news" (p. 103). However, mainstream press "conscientiously, if belatedly" hired women and minorities to cover the news and perspectives of "those segments of society," and stories of special interest to women and minorities are now accepted as "legitimate general-interest stories" (p. 104).

The integration of newsrooms following the Kerner Report, and the issues that dogged the process, can be examined through the lens of media sociology, which theorizes the social factors – from the individual journalist to routines to professional standards to political and economic systems – in the media's construction of news, especially about "those segments of society," as Schudson put it. Media sociology helps explain the range of autonomy and constraints on black journalists in newsrooms, even those who reach the elite level of columnist. If these black journalists could indeed engage in racial projects – that is, organizing and distributing resources along particular racial lines for a specific purpose (Omi & Winant, 2014) – they would do so within the confines of professional journalism.

NEWSROOM INTEGRATION AND MEDIA SOCIOLOGY THEORY

Media sociology's scope is so broad that Reese and Shoemaker (2013) have categorized its research into a hierarchy-of-influences model. Race can be seen operating at all five levels, from the micro- to the macro-level: (1) the *individual* journalist or media producer; (2) *the routines* that form "the most immediate constraining and enabling structures" imposed on the individual in performing journalistic tasks; (3) the *organization* level, which describes the larger entity (corporation, company, publication) within which the individual operates; (4) The *social-institution* level is concerned with the trans-organizational media field, including the audience, sources, and professional organizations; and (5) the macro *social system* level, which analyzes the role of ideology in the construction of news (p. 8).

A hierarchy-of-influences framework is useful for identifying which factors influence black columnists, who themselves may be more influenced by one level more than another. For instance, black columnists, like their white colleagues, are products of newsroom culture and professional paradigms, at the second and fourth levels (Duff, 2008; Riley, 1995; White, 2003; Rowan, 1991).

. Again because most columnists are promoted from traditional newsrooms, it is important to emphasize the intersection of race and newsrooms in communication research. A demographic survey of journalists conducted by Weaver et al. (2006) does not single out columnists but sketches a picture of African American journalists at the individual level of the model. The average black journalist was female, Protestant, and a

Democrat working for a large news organization and making a little over $53,000 a year. Black journalists were the highest-paid minority members yet were the most likely of all groups to say they wanted to leave journalism and the most likely to rate the work of their organization as low (p. 207). Minority journalists were more likely than their white colleagues to believe in the adversarial role of journalism in reporting the news, the role of analyzing complex problems, developing the intellectual interests of the community, and giving ordinary people the right to be heard (Weaver et al., 2006, p. 212).

But little empirical research suggests that black and white journalists report news in significantly different ways. Shoemaker and Vos (2009) note that only anecdotal evidence suggests that African-American journalists cover race differently from their white colleagues (cf. Campbell, 1995). But Entman and Rojecki's (2000) study of 36 local news markets found no difference in reporting by African-American and white journalists (p. 44). Still Shoemaker and Reese (2013) note journalism's "conflicted outlook" on newsroom diversity – "seeking inclusion as a matter of justice and implicit purpose of making the product better, but minority professionals often have been restricted from exercising judgments based on their life experience, precisely where it could be most beneficial to a more complete understanding." And minority journalists confront "the issue of whether they should be advocates for their community" (p. 219).

Even though it was conducted more than a decade before the widespread integration of the news industry, Warren Breed's (1955) seminal research at the routines level illuminates the factors affecting diverse newsrooms. Based on interviews with more

than 100 newsmen, Breed outlined how newspaper newsrooms operate under "covert" policy, in which new journalists learn routines, reporting, and writing and overall culture by "osmosis." The process affects how stories are assigned and edited, and their prominence in the newspaper, as well as the reporter's social standing in the newsroom and ultimately promotions and bonuses. Reese and Ballinger (2001) point out that Breed concludes with critical analysis that would mirror later academic concern about hegemony's role in deciding what is news. Newkirk (2000) and Wilson (1991) connect stealth newsroom policies that Breed described with the struggles of black journalists in mainstream journalism since the post-Kerner integration of newsrooms.

The mainstream press became disenchanted with the Civil Rights Movement when the Watts riots quickly followed the signing of the Voting Rights Act in 1965 (Bond, 2001). But the urban rioting that prompted the Kerner report quickened newsroom integration. With white reporters ineffective in the inner city or getting beaten up by rioters, hiring black journalists made sense. Clarence Page, the Pulitzer Prize-winning columnist whose work is analyzed in this research, was hired out of college by a mainstream newspaper because of what he called a "perverse form of affirmative action": the 400 civil disturbances in America's cities throughout the 1960s, beginning with Watts (Washburn, 2006, p. 10). Robert Maynard, the first black executive editor and publisher of a mainstream newspaper, contended that generations of black journalists owed their jobs to the image of an overturned, burning television news mobile unit during the 1965

Watts riot (Marzolf & Tolliver, 1978, p. 2). Other black reporters "could cite the particular riot that led to their being hired" by mainstream newspapers (Nelson, 1999).

Despite their hiring, Wilson (1991) asserts that Breed's analysis explains why little has changed in the coverage of minorities: "The answer lies in the nature of newsroom organization, values and related policies, and how journalists are socialized to conform to them" (p. 123). Newsrooms reflect white patriarchal society, and the socialization process within them "is dictated by white male cultural norms and values" (Newkirk, 2000, p. 10). In an extension of Breed's work, Wilson (1991) found that journalists of color confront "four fundamental forces in the newsroom": (1) professional isolation, in which they are left outside Breed's "in-groupness" of newsroom congeniality; (2) the assumption of incompetence; (3) imposition of a separate standard, in which they are either seen as either extraordinarily talented or inferior; and (4) limitations in terms of assignments (pp. 144-148).

Although socialization factors are applicable to all journalists, Wilson (1991) contends that the black journalist faces "significant additional complications," including difference of race and culture. The paradox is whether they are forced to follow Kovatch and Rosentiel's (2007) guidelines to be journalist first while their colleagues racialize them and their reporting:

> The Black journalists' paradox forces them to assume a conflict posture with newsroom colleagues and superiors in pursuit of changing traditional policy (p. 142).

More concerned with content than advancement of black journalists, Wilson

asserts that "the environment in which news is defined and the unwritten politics of newsroom organizations combine to facilitate racialism, a condition in which ethnicity is a determinant in whether and how news is reported" (p. 142).

Specifically, many black journalists who joined white newsrooms after Kerner soon believed that they were hired to infiltrate riots but not explore the issues behind them. Their job "was to blend with the crowd and report back to the office so that others could write a story they had not in most instances witnessed and whose causes they could only dimly perceive" (Marzolf & Tolliver, 1978, p. 2). Leon Dash said *The Washington Post* hired him in 1968 because "they were afraid that there would be a riot that summer." But his prospects for promotion did not improve: "I was not seen as being on a career track. The white males were being mentored and brought along by editors. They were being steered to stories that editors knew would make the front page" (Newkirk, 2000, p. 111). [7]

As late as 1992, *Jet* magazine reported that black reporters complained about being sent to the streets during the South Central riots but not being allowed to shape coverage or even write articles. One study on race, television newsrooms, and local newscasts found what its authors called "segregated story assignments" (Poindexter, Smith, & Heider, 2003). In an extension of that research, black newspaper journalists with beats associated with minority-group issues were found to be subject to "racial profiling" because their newsroom undervalued such coverage (Pritchard and Stonbely,

[7] In 1974, Dash joined minority staffers in legal action against *The Post*. In 1995, after serving as a foreign correspondent, he won a Pulitzer Prize in Explanatory Journalism for his portrait of an underclass addict.

2007).

Training programs for minority journalists, another Kerner legacy, also created professional hurdles. Young journalists of color were often steered toward them regardless of their résumés. Minority journalists noted how whites of training and ability, "entering at the same level, somehow did not require a special training program and seemed to move up the ladder more quickly" (Wilson & Gutiérrez, 1985, p. 164). Newsrooms attached a "stigma of inferiority" to trainees (Wilson, 1991, p. 105). A 1982 survey revealed that many newspaper editors believed their minority staffers were less qualified than their white staffers (Wilson & Gutiérrez, 1985, p. 163). Black journalists surveyed in the 1990s felt pigeonholed, paraded as tokens, and felt pressured to perform better than whites as well as feeling culturally isolated and alienated (Shafer, 1993).

Black journalists are also caught in a debate over their objectivity. Objectivity as a professional paradigm can be studied at the social institution level of the hierarchical model, as a broad factor in how journalists in a professional community do their work (Shoemaker & Reese, 2013). But it also affects news construction at the routine and individual level, especially for journalists of color. Gaye Tuchman's (1978) ethnographic research in television and print newsrooms convinced her that objectivity is a construction, a defensive, strategic ritual to evade close scrutiny. Facts, sources, and credibility foremost serve and reinforce routinization (p. 83). A "good" reporter is actually being praised for his mastery within "the web of facticity." Tuchman's concept explains how "objectivity" has been used as an offensive weapon against black reporters.

For years *The Washington Post* and *The New York Times* would not send black correspondents to Africa, and *The New York Daily News* did not let minority journalists cover the O. J. Simpson trial in 1995 (Newkirk, 2000). Black journalists felt exploited as "hit men for whites" and pilloried in their own community as traitors and "pawns of their oppressors" while editors praised them for writing critically of African American people as a barometer of their objectivity (Newkirk, 2000, pp. 143, 146).

Tuchman and Todd Gitlin (1980) outlined the dance between social movements and the news media for access. Tuchman (1978) pointed out that the lower classes are cut off unless they recruit middle-class supporters who: (1) have routinized media contacts; (2) attack the media for a lack of coverage; (3) get journalists to advocate for the cause. But while reporters are the key source for access-poor groups, a role that black journalists have tried to perform, newsroom routines limit and shape their discretion in news gathering and reporting (Tuchman, 1978, p. 134). Newkirk (2000) contended that black journalists have to devise strategies to offer stories on blacks that "conform to the interests, desires, and tastes of a white audience. "Renegades" trying to counter preconceived notions often become outcasts in their own newsrooms (p. 10).

Studies on newsrooms, under the umbrella term hierarchy of influences, offer scant findings on columnists. This study will address that gap while determining whether column writing is a space for resisting dominance or for keeping the conversation restricted to acceptable discourse associated with mainstream (i.e., white) coverage.

COLUMN WRITING

Columns written by identifiable journalists have long been a staple of newspapers and magazines, even as objectivity remained the standard in American journalism (McNair, 2006; Riley, 1998; Silvester, 1997). Printed commentary dates back to the 17th century English Civil War (McNair, 2006). Columns became more popular in America after World War I, an industry acknowledgement that news is constructed (Schudson, 1981 p. 151). Compared with Britain, the United States is considered "the golden land of the columnist" because of national syndication and the reader interest in local commentary (Silvester, 1997, p. xxv). In today's struggling print industry, columnists are more important because they use fewer newsroom sources, are easy to brand, and provide commentary instead of easily obtained facts (McNair, 2008). Still, most opinion journalists at mainstream papers are best classified as reportorial news columnists because they use sources as reporters would to augment their arguments, adding commentary and perspective to events in the news (Riley, 1998, xiii).

There are numerous university-level primers on writing commentary (among them, Fink, 1999). These scholars outline characteristics of the successful columnist, descriptions that are valuable for comparisons with the particular responsibilities of blacks in the field. To Fink (1999), columnists should serve the public, provide a forum, be society's watchdog, and inform and guide their readers to cause change (p. 3). Riley (1998) sees columnists sharing three traits: they are free to take any approach to their

column, they must be "interesting," and their work is personal (p. xiv). Good (1993) also sees the columnist's personal identity as being synonymous with his work (p. 8).

This attribute is relevant when analyzing the intersection of the professional and the personal for black commentators. Pioneering columnist Carl T. Rowan found that his personal columns provoked the most mail (Riley, 1998, p. 275). Fink (1999) notes that columnists can base their opinions "on personal experience or insider knowledge" and points out that Clarence Page uses first person as "clear signals to readers that his reporting is coming from the inside" (p. 123). Thus being black is expertise enough to comment on race. In fact, Fink tells black students that they can write "authoritatively about black affairs on your campus" (p. 124). But Les Payne, a former Newsday editor and columnist, said that a society of black columnists was founded because too many white editors thought being black was the sole criterion to write about race (personal communication, August 2, 2013).

Columnists are classified as national or local columnists, depending on whether they are focused on national or local issues and events. According to Suzette Martinez Standring's guide to column writing, the local columnist (often called a metro columnist) "listens to the local heartbeat, and writes about what makes a city tick – and who's doing the ticking off":

> The metro column is loud with victory yells, government whispers, NIMBY (not in my backyard) ballyhoo, and collective groans. As the community's eyes, the writer examines dark underbellies, public waste, colorful characters, trials and triumphs on behalf of the readers. (2008, p. 110)

Syndicated columnists appear in publications across the country. According to Media Matters, a liberal nonprofit organization, syndicated newspaper columnists "have a unique ability to influence public opinion and the national debate" (2007). The organization found that 60% of the country's daily newspapers published more conservative syndicated columnists than "progressive" columnists. It found that 20% of the papers ran more "progressives," with the remaining 20 percent balanced (2007). Of the columnists to be examined in this research, Media Matters reported in 2007 that in additional to their home publications, Leonard Pitts Jr. appeared in 213 newspapers with an average circulation of almost 86,000; Clarence Page in 127 papers (about 80,000 circulation); Eugene Robinson in 95 papers (about 103,000) and Cynthia Tucker in 50 papers (about 78,000).

Noted columnists have provided context for understanding their work. Walter Lippmann, perhaps the most influential columnist of the previous century, said that he conceived of his columns "as an effort to keep contemporary events in such perspective that his readers will have no reason to be surprised when something of importance occurs" (Rivers, 1967, p. 59) To Richard Reeves, a syndicated columnist in the early 1990s, an opinion column is "an idea calculated to offer a different perspective on some known facts, arouse intellectual interest, produce discussion, maybe even affect thought and attitudes" (Root, 1991, p. 83).

Columnists, with greater autonomy over their assignments, are free to return to same topics, even using the same information and themes. Neither Reeves nor Tom

Wicker, a *New York Times* columnist in the 1990s, assumed that readers consume every column and keep track of topics they write about (Root, 1991, p. 86). Reeves stressed: "Over the years you learn that in a media-bombarded society, you have to repeat and repeat to get through – that's what commercials are about" (Root, 1991, p. 85).

Columns often employ elements of narrative journalism, made famous by Thomas Wolfe in the 1960s. In narrative journalism, four literary elements are injected into the article or column: scenes, dialogue, status details, and point of view. One of the most powerful examples of a narrative column is Gene Patterson's widely praised "A Flower for the Graves" in the *Atlanta Constitution*, published in 1963 after four black girls were killed in a Birmingham church bombing. As Clark (2006) pointed out, the column "is argument, but it is also a story" with symbols. It began:

> A Negro mother wept in the street Sunday morning in front of a Baptist Church in Birmingham. In her hand she held a shoe, one shoe, from the foot of her dead child. We hold that shoe with her.
>
> Every one of us in the white South holds that small shoe in his hand. It is too late to blame the sick criminals who handled the dynamite. The FBI and the police can deal with that kind. The charge against them is simple. They killed four children.
>
> Only we can trace the truth, Southerner — you and I. We broke those children's bodies. (2006)

This research will identify whether columnists are local or national, and more important, how their beats influence their choice of topics. It will also examine the style of the column writing.

COLUMN WRITING AND THEORY

As newspapers have turned to more commentary in their pages and websites, academia has become more interested in opinion journalism. Duff (2008) pointed out that the effectiveness of British columnists was a function of their willingness to focus on a theme and that there was a positive correlation between a columnist's political impact and the factual or informational content of the columns.

Research on race and gender on the editorial and op-ed pages is emerging. Andsager and Mastin (2007) found that readers participating in an experiment did not consider black columnists less credible sources, suggesting that race should not be a barrier to such a significant position in the news media. Four studies found that male and female sports columnists of all colors maintain white patriarchal hegemony (Hardin, Kuehn, Jones, Genovese, & Balaji, 2009; Gavin, 2007; Bostic, 2009; McElroy, in press). Harp, Bachmann, and Loke found that female columnists, while still a minority on op-ed pages, discussed such non-gendered topics as the economy and politics (2014). Relevant to this research, they found that most women (about 75%) did not write about their personal lives even though columnists have the liberty do so, and only 10% wrote from what could be considered a feminist standpoint (Harp, Bachmann & Loke, 2014, p. 299).

Framing

Communication scholars agree that framing exists in journalistic work – naturally, innocently, strategically – but differ on how to define frames, how they operate, and what they do and to whom. Entman claimed in 1993 that framing theory, widely employed

across disciplines, lacked a general statement explaining how frames "become embedded within and make themselves manifest in a text, or how framing influences thinking" (p. 51). Almost two decades later, Scheufele and Scheufele (2010) asserted that framing theory still had "conceptual shortcomings," especially within their notion of cognitive framing (p. 110).

At their simplest, frames are "organizing *principles* that are socially *shared* and persistent over time, that work *symbolically* to meaningfully *structure* the social world" (Reese, 2001, p. 11, his italics). Hertog and McLeod (2001) stress that frames are cultural rather than cognitive phenomena that must be placed beyond the text, again placing importance to the social world. The emphasis on the social world is significant to this research, which engages in racism and other systemic manifestations of power. Gitlin (1980) was among the first scholars to emphasize framing processes "within the context of the distribution of political and social power" (Carragee & Roefs, 2004, p. 214). Power, in turn, is often critiqued through Gramsci's (1971) concept of hegemony, in which ideology structures our world along strategic lines, turning the inequality of dominance into common sense.

Power and ideology have re-emerged as integral in the construction of frames (Carragee & Roefs, 2004; Durham, 2001; Entman, 2010). To these scholars, frames do more than identify topics; they "construct particular meanings concerning issues by their patterns of emphasis, interpretation and exclusion" (Carragee & Roefs, 2004, p. 217). Those patterns are important when considering the role of persuasion in column writing.

For this research, Gamson and Modigliani (1987) offer a more applicable definition of framing, "a central organizing idea or story line that provides meaning to an unfolding strip of events, weaving a connection among them. The frame suggests what the controversy is about, the essence of the issue" (p. 143). This definition is especially useful in seeing a connection between the coverage of events, even if the columnists themselves did not explicitly do so.

Columns, by their nature, eschew the standard journalistic practices of objective reporting and the inverted pyramid style of starting an article with the most important news. Opinion pieces are more likely to be written specifically as stories and narratives. Therefore, any consideration of framing must nod to its role in the storytelling process. In this case, Entman's four-part definition (1993) is also useful: frames "define *problems* — determine what a causal agent is doing with what costs and benefits, usually measured in terms of common cultural values; *diagnose causes* — identify the forces creating the problem; *make moral judgments* — evaluate causing agents and their effects; and *suggest remedies* — offer and justify treatments for the problems and predict their likely effects" (p. 52, his italics). Stories are given a frame, and a frame tells a story.

Brewer and Gross (2010) refine the use of framing theory in column writing by emphasizing *partisan frames*, which are developed by politicians and activists advocating specific issue positions and are communicated to the public via the media (p. 159, their italics). Brewer and Gross explain that by highlighting certain information or ideas, partisan frames present one position as correct and the other as being wrong – affirmative

action either creates "reverse discrimination" or offers "remedial action" to offset longstanding discrimination (2010, p. 159). Subtle differences between frames have significant effects on the audience; for instance, whites were more emotionally engaged and politically opposed to affirmative action for blacks when the concept was framed as "unfair advantage" rather than "reverse discrimination" (Masters & Sanders, 1990).

On the other hand, most frames generated by journalists are considered *news frames*, which are "broadly applicable storytelling devices that can be used to present any number of issues" (Brewer & Gross, 2010, p. 160). These news frames can be categorized as episodic or thematic (Iyengar, 1990). Episodic frames cast events as individual outcomes, up close, with no spatial or temporal connection to a larger sense of the world – a looter is described with no regard for the circumstances that might incite looting. A thematic frame takes a longer view – systemic racism and long-simmering resentment as possible causes of looting. Iyengar's work is seminal because it identifies a media effect on the audiences subjected to episodic and thematic frames. As Gandy (1994) points out, journalism's traditions (and its attendant short-term memory) favor episodic over the thematic frames, leading the public toward assigning blame and responsibility to individuals instead of institutions or organizations. Thus, conservative policies that frame "welfare queens" as the public face of government assistance have dire consequences for poor African-Americans. "Where individuals are understood to be responsible for their misfortune," Gandy wrote, "there is no place for a public response beyond punishment" (1994, p. 41). On the other hand, thematic framing led audiences to

be more sympathetic to minority groups (Gandy, 1994).

Golan (2010) asserts that framing analysis of opinion journalism is particularly salient because researchers can identify the opinion writer's central arguments. Golan (2010) found that editorials and op-ed articles framed the medical marijuana issue differently, with editorials relying on a broader range of frames. Framing has been applied to opinion writing about affirmative action, with newspapers with greater diversity relying on the diversity frame more than "remedial action" and "no preferential treatment" frames (Richardson & Lancendorfer, 2004).

In work that is quite similar to this research, Campbell and Wiggins (2014) found that three African-American columnists, Leonard Pitts Jr., Cynthia Tucker, and Eugene Robinson, relied on the duality frame in writing about the historic election of Barack Obama in 2008. They found that the columnists, who personally took pride in his election, defined him by race even as they sought to transcend race (Campbell & Wiggins, 2014). In fact, their commentary mirrored Obama's campaign vision. In an important finding for this research, Campbell and Wiggins found that white columnists did not write about race, leaving it the domain of their African-American colleagues (2014). By engaging in framing analysis, this research will build on the preceding studies, in particular Campbell and Wiggins' findings, while also incorporating other theoretical frameworks in fully assessing the columnists' work.

Black Columnists

There is a wealth of historical scholarship on columnists in the Black Press, notably on the advocacy of Ida B. Wells against lynching (Coleman, 2004), Langston Hughes' columns in *The Chicago Defender*, and sports columnists who led the push for athletic integration (Lamb, 1999). Delilah Beasley was the first black female columnist for a white newspaper, writing the *Oakland Tribune*'s "Activities Among Negroes" from 1923 to 1934. Her column, which focused on the area's black elite, advocated for her race (Wagner, 2009). Beasley said that the aims of her column were to elevate blacks in the eyes of whites, to promote interracial understanding and to build white support for black social justice (Wagner, 2009, p. 83). African American columnists in black and white publications followed her lead.

In the 1920s and 1930s, George S. Schuyler Jr., a socialist-turned-conservative, became the first black journalist to gain mainstream prominence when "the acidic bite of his ideas" caught the eye of H.L. Mencken (Goodman, 1977; Harrison, 2002; Riley, 1998; Wilson, 1991). Schuyler wrote for Mencken's *American Mercury* and was a longtime columnist with *The Pittsburgh Courier*. Columns had a special appeal during the heyday in the Black Press, where opinion leaders brought "personal identity to a cause" (Pride & Wilson, 1997, p. 150). The black literary and political elite wrote for its opinion pages, including Langston Hughes at *The Chicago Defender*, and Du Bois at *The Defender* and *The Pittsburgh Courier*. In the 1930s, *The Courier* published 15 columnists, including Du Bois, Schuyler, and the noted author Zora Heale Hurston, and

used such rubrics "Africa Speaks" and "A White Man's Views" (Nelson, 1999). A 1947 survey of 49 columnists at 18 black newspapers found that their common theme was "the denial of first-class citizenship rights to the Negro" (Pride & Wilson, 1997, p. 152).

Two black journalists began Washington-based columns for mainstream newspapers in the 1960s.[8] Carl T. Rowan, a former political and foreign correspondent, left the Johnson Administration in 1965 to write a syndicated column for the *Chicago Daily News*. The Publishers Newspaper Syndicate allowed Rowan to write three columns a week "on any subject of choice" (Rowan, 1994, p. 278). Marketed not as black but as a Washington insider, Rowan was picked up by more than 100 newspapers but none in the South or in such conservative states as South Dakota and Montana (Rowan, 1994, p. 282). In his first column, he told readers that he had come "to inform, to provoke, to prod, to inspire." He also told them that while he occasionally would discuss race, he was not writing a civil rights column (Rowan, 1994).

In 1966, William Raspberry began "Potomac Watch," an urban-affairs column for *The Washington Post* that was nationally syndicated. Raspberry, who won a Pulitzer for commentary in 1994, called himself a liberal but was generally seen as a conservative (Schudel, 2012; Riley, 1998, Wilson, 1991). When Raspberry died in 2012, his Post

[8] On the local level, several black journalists wrote race-related columns for mainstream newspapers. Peggy Peterman was promoted from the *St. Petersburg Times'* Negro pages to the main newsroom in 1965. My father, George McElroy, was the first African American to write a weekly column for *The Houston Post,* starting in 1956.

obituary said that his column-writing had been "filtered through the prism of his experience growing up in the segregated South" (Schudel, 2012).

In the 1970s, more black columnists wrote for mainstream newspapers, among them Vernon D. Jarrett at *The Chicago Tribune*; Chuck Stone at *The Philadelphia Daily News*; Dorothy Gilliam at *The Washington Post*; Bob Hayes at *The San Francisco Examiner*; Earl Caldwell, a former *New York Times* reporter who wrote a column for *The New York Daily News*; and Robert Maynard at the *Oakland Tribune*, where he had become the first black editor of a mainstream newspaper (Riley, 1998). Not so incidentally, Jarrett, Stone, and Hayes were among the 44 print and broadcast journalists who founded the National Association of Black Journalists in 1975.

Riley's *Biographical Dictionary of American Newspaper Columnists* (1995) lists 600 columnists appearing in American newspapers from the Civil War to the mid-1990s. It includes the biographies of Rowan, Raspberry, Jarrett, Page, and 25 other black columnists of varying ranks of prestige, with much of its sourcing coming from NABJ documentation previously written by Dawkins (1997, 2003) and Wickham (1997). The dictionary also includes Du Bois, Hughes, Roy Wilkins, C.G. Woodson, and Manning Marable because of their Black Press columns. Penguin's transatlantic compilation of columnists, edited by Silvester (1997), chose Hughes as its only African-American entry, ignoring Rowan, Raspberry, and Page.

Unlike his biographical guide, Riley's *The American Newspaper Columnist* (1998) devotes a separate chapter to the history of minority journalists with columns.

Riley calls for editors to allow black commentators the same leeway they give white columnists (p. 213). He has a fondness for moderate voices like the "affably, calmly conservative" Raspberry and empathizes with Rowan:

> Despite his many, many columns urging fair treatment for black Americans, he has been, on occasion, called an Uncle Tom by more militant blacks. He frequently exhorts young African-Americans to aim high and get the best possible education. Rowan is not at all a one-issue columnist, commenting on other social problems, national politics, and international affairs (1995, p. 278).

In 1989, Page became the first black columnist to win a Pulitzer in the commentary division for what the jurors called "his provocative columns on local and national affairs," which centered on race relations (Fischer, 1991; Flournoy, 2012). In fact, the blurbs for these Pulitzer-winning entries emphasize the role black columnists play in exposing the problems of troubled people, and how the industry validates such discourse.[9] For instance, Raspberry won in 1994 for "his compelling commentaries on a variety of social and political topics," which, according to his *Washington Post* obituary included "female genital mutilation in Africa to urban violence, to musings on the legacies of civil rights leaders" (Schudel, 2012). In addition, *The New York Daily News'* E.R. Shipp won in 1996 for "her penetrating columns on race, welfare and other social issues, and *The Washington Post's* Eugene Robinson in 2009 "for his eloquent columns on the 2008 presidential campaign that focus on the election of the first African-American president, showcasing graceful writing and grasp of the larger historic picture."

[9] The blurbs are published on http://www.pulitzer.org/bycat/Commentary.

His winning entry included a column about African-Americans still struggling "with poverty, poor education and diminished expectations" (Flournoy, 2012).

The number of black columnists at mainstream newspapers grew from 8 in the 1970s, to 22 at the beginning of the 1980s to 31 at the start of the 1990s, the latest growth "a creature of the diversity-celebrating" decade (Riley, 1998, p. 195). Leonard Pitts Jr., a *Miami Herald* music critic who had grown tired of the concert scene, began writing his general-interest column in 1994 (Martinez Standring, 2008; Riley, 1998, 1995). The *New York Times* hired its first black op-ed columnist, Bob Herbert, in 1993. Herbert had been a correspondent for NBC News and a columnist at *The New York Daily News*, where he had been drawn into a dispute between black staffers suing the paper for racial discrimination. Management countered that the success of Herbert, who had not joined the lawsuit, was proof that they did promote qualified blacks (Newkirk, 2000). Earlier that year, E.R. Shipp, a prominent reporter, had left *The Times*: "I wanted to be treated the way they'd have treated a white person who came there, as I did, with advanced degrees in journalism and law. There was no compelling reason for this self-respecting black woman to stay" (Newkirk, 1993, p. 195). The *Daily News* hired her as a columnist in 1994; two years later, she was awarded the Pulitzer for commentary. She essentially replaced Caldwell, who had left *The Daily News* the year she joined. Caldwell's editors had killed a column in which he accused white police officers of raping black taxi drivers (Riley, 1998; Bennett, 1995). In 2006, *The Daily News* dropped Shipp's column, saying it wanted to change directions (Prince, 2006).

THE MONROE TROTTER GROUP

Little if any research in media sociology has examined black columnists or the black journalists at the elite level; in addition, the hierarchy of influences model does not consider the significance of ethnic group associations. Therefore this section provides a window into the thinking of black columnists by tracing the history of the Monroe Trotter Group, "a self-improvement association," according to a Courtland Milloy column in *The Washington Post* (1997). By piecing together a history of the organization, it is possible to gain insight into the sociology of black columnists in general, especially after they were accused of unfairly supporting Barack Obama during the 2008 primaries.

Les Payne, a former *Newsday* columnist and managing editor, said that he helped found the group in 1992 to improve the column-writing skills of blacks who, in his words, were not journalistically qualified to hold such an esteemed position in the newsroom but had been promoted because of their race (personal communication, August 13, 2013). At its annual gatherings, the group would hold policy seminars and bring in speakers; the journalists in attendance often wrote related columns for their local papers. Yet the Trotter Group has received little academic or industry scrutiny even though it provides a window into professional lived experiences of black columnists. Trotter members are responsible for most of the public details about the group: DeWayne Wickham, a *USA Today* columnist and Trotter co-founder; Wayne Dawkins, a former columnist in New Jersey who has written two histories of NABJ, edited a Trotter anthology, and manages Columbia University's Black Alumni News; and Richard Prince,

a former columnist and *NABJ Journal* editor who writes a weekly news and notes column about minority journalists.[10] The Trotter Group can be seen as a haven for black columnists who can commiserate about their dual statuses in the newsroom and the community.

The Trotter Group formed after two of its founders, *USA Today's* DeWayne Wickham and *Boston Globe's* Derrick Z. Jackson, and Wickham, saw themselves as the only journalists on an organized visit to Guantanamo who reported on the horrid conditions for Haitian refugees. Concluding that no one else "in that pack was interested in the words" of the actual refugees, they decided to ensure that journalists – especially black columnists – did better (Nieman Reports, 1993). The Trotter website (www.monroetrottergroup.com) adds a more overtly political reason for coming into existence: then-candidate Bill Clinton's promise to help the Haitians "raised the hope that this and other issues of importance to African-Americans might be lifted out of the political fog if he made his way into the White House." Thus, equally important as the coverage of the refugee camp was "the possibility of real change in American leadership." According to the website, the goal of the Trotter Group is "to ensure that the voices of black columnists would speak the loudest in the debates that affect African-American citizens." Wickham has said that the black vote, rather than so-called Reagan Democrats, had put Clinton in the White House (Neiman, 1993).

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[10] I have never spoken with Richard Prince but have appeared in his column, Richard Prince's Journal-isms, as a *New York Times* editor.

The group is named for William Monroe Trotter, co-founder of the Niagara Movement and founder of a black newspaper in Boston, *The Guardian,* at the turn of the 20th century. *The Guardian* solidified Boston's black community more than other agency or vehicle (Pride & Wilson, 1997, p. 124). Trotter is also known for a 1914 White House confrontation with President Woodrow Wilson. The Virginia-born president had received the endorsement of such black leaders as Trotter in 1912 but disappointed them by continuing federal segregationist policies while stoking the fires of Jim Crow in the South. In the meeting with Negro leaders, Wilson told Trotter that "segregation is not humiliating but a benefit … Your manner offends me." The ensuring argument made the front page of *The New York Times* under the headline "President Resents Negro's Criticisms" (1914). The Trotter Group takes pride in being named for the "rudest black journalist ever in American history" (Chideya, 1996).

Jackson, a Nieman fellow and a *Boston Globe* columnist, persuaded the Nieman Foundation to sponsor the Trotter Group's inaugural two-day conference at Harvard in December 1992. Forty were invited, and 18 columnists joined (Dawkins, 2003). Payne told the group that its mission was to:

> [C]onstruct, define, analyze and most of all dedicate our voices, mixed and diverse as they are, as instruments for change, racial fairness and empowerment. Stating that columnists ... "may well be the most powerful writers in the craft," he went on to note the need to "begin making sure that we field a counterforce to the white viewpoint in the media ... for generations to come' (Gilliam, 1995).

The Harvard conference included a public panel discussion, "The African-American Voice in the Mainstream Press," an indication of the Trotter Group's focus. Six

more columnists attended the session to bring the conference attendance to 24, including six women and three male sports columnists. At the start of the discussion, Jackson noted that they were all trying to figure out "what it is that we're about in a largely white newsroom in a world that calls itself increasingly multicultural" (Nieman, 1993).

The panelists, who included *The Washington Post's* Donna Britt and *New York Times* sports columnist William C. Rhoden (at the time the paper's only black columnist), talked about their struggles in and out of the newsroom, and always having to prove themselves. Betty Bayé recalled that when *The Louisville Courier* announced that she would be a columnist, a man had written a signed letter to her paper to ask whether the paper needed "another nigger on the editorial page." She said: "Not knowing whether I was going to write about flowers, petunias, whatever it was, he did not want to hear it" (Nieman, 1993).

While Vernon Jarrett (a pioneering *Chicago Sun-Times* columnist and the father-in-law of Valerie Jarrett, a member of President Obama's White House staff) was in attendance, Carl T. Rowan, William Raspberry, and Clarence Page were not, nor were any past or future Pulitzer Prize winners in the commentary category (Jackson would become a finalist in 2001). But the group is known to elite black columnists, and Robinson and Rhoden are on Trotter's email list-serve (personal communication, 2013). Colbert I. King, who won the 2003 Pulitzer for commentary, mentioned the group in a 2004 column that questioned whether black columnists should rethink their criticism of Harry Belafonte, who had disparaged Secretary of State Colin Powell. Archival readings

suggest that the Trotter Group is mostly composed of such local/Metro columnists as *Oakland Tribune's* Brenda Payne and *Newsday's* Sheryl McCarthy, both present at the Trotter Group's third annual retreat at Stanford in November 1994 (Baird, 1995; Dawkins, 2003). There is also a strong Washington contingent that includes Wickham and *Washington Post* local columnists, including Milloy, Britt, Gilliam, Mary C. Curtis, and King.

By 1995, the group secured a White House meeting with President Clinton, whom they also would meet in 1997 (Dawkins, 2007; NABJ Journal, 2008). The 1995 meeting with Clinton mainly consisted of Trotter Group founders, including Wickham, Bayé, Jackson, Payne, *Las Vegas Review-Journal*'s Barbara A. Robinson and *The Tennessean's* Dwight Lewis. One newcomer, *Fort Worth Star-Telegram* columnist Nichele Hoskins, wrote about the meeting: "Over glasses of Coca Cola and cookies, Clinton answered the questions that he could, admitted ignorance when he couldn't answer and expressed a willingness to expound" (Dawkins, 2003; NABJ Journal, 1996).

The Trotter Group released three anthologies in the 1990s; two were self-published reprints of newspaper columns. The third, *Thinking Black: Some of the Nation's Best Black Columnists Speak Their Mind*, which Random House published in 1997, is a compilation of original essays in which the columnists are portrayed as being free of their newsroom constraints. *Thinking Black* also includes a Lisa Baird column about the Long Island Rail Road shootings, in which a black man killed six white commuters in 1993, that her *Bergen County Record* editor would not run because he

"disagreed with some of her premises" (Wickham, 1998; Riley, 1995, 1998). In telling the stories of such black columnists as Baird who quit and others who were demoted, *Thinking Black* couples being a black columnist with unavoidable newsroom strife. Black columnists have "difficulties and frustrations" with their white editors, who are "uncomfortable with their tone or approach" (Riley, 1998, p. 215).

Indeed, the newsroom drama surrounding black columnists has attracted the most industry attention. In the 1990s, other high-profile incidents included Earl Caldwell's firing from *The New York Daily News* and Curtis Austin's resignation from *The Dallas Morning News* (Cox, 1992). Gilliam, a Trotter member and NABJ president, complained about authentic African-American voices being silenced and the rise of black conservative pundits "who distort our reality and endanger our communities" (Gilliam, 1995). Wickham also railed against "black professional conservatives who cross-dress as journalists" (1996, p. 19; S. G. Riley, 1998, p. 212). In *Thinking Back*, Wickham and Pamela Newkirk, who wrote the foreword, considered black columnists at mainstream newspapers the descendants of the independent Black Press editors like Trotter. But some reviewers were disappointed that the book ignored the Black Press (Dent, 1996). The scholar Keith O. Hilton complained that readers are supposed to believe that "our best voices are now heard through the white dominated press. Yes, these featured columnists are among our best, however, they only represent one room in our media tradition" (1996).

During the Democratic presidential primaries in 2008, black columnists were

accused of being "effusively and unabashedly supporting Sen. Barack Obama, and highly critical of and even caustic towards Sen. Hillary Clinton" solely because of race (Friedman, 2008). Geraldine Ferraro told Fox News: 'You know all the surrogates that they had out there from the black journalists ... have you read Bob Herbert recently in the past six months? There wasn't one column that had anything decent to say about Hillary." Writing for the Nieman Watchdog blog, *Newsday's* Saul Friedman noted that even though *The New York Times'* Maureen Dowd and Frank Rich backed Obama while criticizing Clinton, but he was not as troubled by white liberal columnists because they had not been as "single-minded." Isaac Bailey was among the black columnists who left a comment on Friedman's blog post:

> Maybe the better question is why so many white columnists assume that black people are voting for and black columnists supporting Obama because they share a skin tone. … How is a black columnist's support for Obama different from a white columnist's support? … Also, if you haven't read any critical questions being asked of Obama by black columnists, then maybe you should get out more.

Newsday's Sheryl McCarthy, a Trotter member, wrote that Friedman's conclusion that black columnists had "failed to engage in the type of critical thinking that should be expected of journalists, ranks high on the list of the silliest things a white person has ever said about black people" (2008).

Column writing is an important form of journalism, and black columnists have joined the ranks of those given a platform to speak free of objectivity's constraints. Although black columnists have been honored at the highest level of American journalism, others have complained that they had been treated with less regard than their

white colleagues. But many of these complaints came from columnists without a national profile. Left unanswered was whether elite black columnists faced the same constraints or had more autonomy to discuss race.

Chapter 4: Research Questions

The goal of this study is a better understanding of racial discourse from a crucial yet often ignored perspective: that of the elite African-American who is also an elite journalist. As African Americans, the columnists are situated below social structures that house ideology and power. But they are above the average media worker, at least among African-Americans, and far above the voiceless and "the problem people" they likely were to write about.

The previous literature outlined perspectives on double consciousness and racial formation in America, two concepts that recognize the importance of discourse in the production of power and ideology and their role in race. The literature also mapped out the various roles that race has played in the development of American journalism, leading to the creation of a Black Press and the integration of American mainstream newsrooms. It also noted how column writing is a distinct form of journalism that is often ripe with frames. The literature informs this examination of columns written by elite black journalists, the circumstances under which their work is produced, and the racialized goals, if any, of their work.

Based on the previous research and the goals of this study, these questions are designed to analyze the range and the depth of racial discussion by elite black columnists:

RQ1: In general, what do elite black columnists write about?

This question, to be answered by textual analysis, has two purposes. It will address the dearth of research on black columnists' overall work, regardless of topic. It also puts the

columnists' commentary on race in context with their overall body of work.

RQ1a: How does having a local or a national assignment guide the work of black columnists?

This question helps to identify patterns based on specific beats.

RQ2: Collectively, how do elite black columnists write about race?

This research question specifically will analyze columns that refer to or mention race, and it also will examine how black columnists present racial topics and arguments to their readers. The question is designed to find the role, if any, that black columnists play in American racial discourse and their perspective on race in America. The purpose is to identify any patterns that emerge when they write about race.

RQ2a: How does race inform their approach to the news?

The goal of this question is to further identify how a black columnist might perceive the news through a racialized lens. The analysis will focus on the journalistic and rhetorical tools that black columnists employ when they write about race. This question also will examine the events or stated motives that prompted the columnists to mention race in their columns, either as the central focus or as an aside.

RQ2b: Which themes or frames emerge in their columns about race?

This question will examine the racialized worldviews of black columnists, and crucially, how those worldviews are central to their arguments about race.

RQ2c: What role does race play in the Pulitzer Prize winning entries of black columnists?

The goal is to learn the significance and prominence of race in works that the industry considered worthy of its highest prize, with the aim of gauging how the profession as a whole regards race.

RQ3: What do elite black columnists say about their autonomy in the newsrooms?

This question establishes whether elite black columnists, in their own words, articulate the same constraints that black journalists have discussed and the ways newsroom autonomy might affect their column-writing.

RQ3a: How do elite black columnists describe their sense, if any, of duality?

This question is tied directly to Du Bois' conceptualization of double consciousness. Previous research indicated a paradox (Wilson, 1991) or a conflict (Newkirk, 2001) for black journalists, within their newsrooms and as journalists.

RQ4: How do black columnists describe writing about race?

RQ4a: How does thinking about their readership influence their writing about race, and vice versa?

These questions are designed to examine the role of race in their column-writing process, and how the audience figures in that dynamic.

RQ4b: How do elite black columnists discuss racial discourse, and their role in shaping it, in their own words?

With this question, columnists can discuss the national conversation about race and how they feel it has evolved, if at all. They can also describe their direct role in shaping it.

An analysis of columns and columnists strengthens media sociology theory, which tends to separate journalists only as reporters and editors without distinguishing the ways autonomy constructs news; instead, this research might help us understand columnists as distinct newsworkers within the newspaper hierarchy. Furthermore, an analysis of columns written by African American journalists, as well as interviews with them, sharpen our perception of the role of race in mainstream newsrooms and in the content produced in them. Beyond the communication field, this dissertation lays the groundwork for an investigation of racial discourse produced by a little-observed source: the elite, black news producer.

Discourse analyses of columns as well as the columnists' own narratives about their work should illuminate a sharper picture about journalism and its role in shaping racial discourse in America. This study hopes to contribute to such analysis across disciplines by painting a fuller picture of how news informs "cultural production and the distribution of social and cultural power" (Zelizer, 2004, p. 183).

Chapter 5: Methodology

To answer the research questions, this study used two qualitative methods to examine the work of elite African American columnists. Discourse analysis, in particular textual analysis, examined the latent and manifest meanings of text to uncover what Hall (1975) called "the unnoticed, perhaps unconscious, social framework of reference," which might embed the work of African American columnists (p. 16). In-depth interviews with the columnists ensured that the textual analysis was complemented by a context that was not readily evident by content alone (Philo, 2007; McCracken, 1988).

Discourse includes media, communication, language, and symbols. Its production seems natural but is instead a mechanism in a socially constructed reality. Therefore analyses try to deconstruct discourse to uncover such powerful forces as ideology and domination (Lindlof & Taylor, 2009, p. 46; Berger & Luckmann, 1966). Pertinent to this research, discourse helps formulate race and racial realities, usually from a white perspective (van Dijk, 1991, p. ix; 2009a, 2009b; Kellstadt, 2003). In fact, news media texts shape and define the realities of minority groups within national discourses (Jiwani & Richardson, 2011, p. 251).

In addition, qualitative interviews produce compelling discourse analysis that other tools cannot captured (Spradley, 1979; Weiss, 1995; Lindlof & Taylor, 2011). Qualitative and quantitative research can be improved by understanding "the beliefs and experiences of the actors in question" (McCracken, 1988, p. 9). But Fürsich (2009) warns against using the interviewee's words to gauge reality, noting "the question is not how

accurately does the text reflect reality but what version of reality is normalized and as a consequence, how emancipatory or hegemonic is the text" (p. 249). This inquiry was at the heart of this study. Based on analysis of their texts and their words, how do black columnists participate in racial discourse?

DISCOURSE ANALYSES

By studying the columns as text, this research used discourse analysis to answer the following research questions:

> **RQ1:** In general, what do elite black columnists write about?
> **RQ1a:** How does having a local or a national assignment guide the work of black columnists?
> **RQ2:** Collectively, how do elite black columnists write about race?
> **RQ2a:** How does race inform their approach to the news?
> **RQ2b:** Which themes or frames emerge in their columns about race?
> **RQ2c:** What role does race play in the Pulitzer Prize-winning entries of black columnists?

Discourse consists of spoken and written texts, which can be "read" (Fürsich, 2009, p. 241). Analyses have established that media content, especially in terms of news, "plays out myths, rituals and archetypes" (Fürsich, 2009, p. 245). The analyses "strongly offset the popular notion that journalistic accounts reflect the world as it is" (Zelizer, 2004, p. 128). Rather than being transparent or simplistic, news texts "encode larger messages about the shape of life beyond the sequencing of actions that comprise a news event" (Zelizer, 2004, p. 111).

Discourse analysts acknowledge that their field is hampered by confusion over terminology and methodological approaches (cf. Fürsich, 2009; Alba-Juez, 2009; van Dijk, 2009b; Curtin, 1995) An analysis of discourse can be quantitative (e.g., content

analysis) or qualitative. But the umbrella term discourse analysis strives to make sense of text/language *and* context. It is a study of "language use and communication in their socio-cultural contexts" (Van Dijk, 1985, p. 44). The social dimension distinguishes discourse analysis from linguistics and allows scholars to examine the ways language "gets recruited 'on site' to enact specific social activities and social identities" (Gee, 1999, p. 1). Evolved from classic rhetorical tradition, it reflects modern sensibilities in linguistics, anthropology, psychology, history, and political sciences in examining the contemporary spectrum of talk and text.

The messages in texts may not be explicit to all readers, nor are their social implications particularly overt. For example, during the controversy over Olympic gymnast Gabby Douglas's hair, Rochelle Riley complained in a *Detroit Free Press* column: "I am not my hair" (2012, August 4). The sentence, repeated throughout her column, is a direct reference to the 2005 song "I Am Not My Hair," which is considered an anthem for black women. It is racialized text that might not be recognized by a white researcher or captured by a quantitative content analysis, which is designed to uncover systematic, manifest content (Riffe, Lacy & Ficco, 2005, p. 24; Poindexter & McCombs, 2000, p. 188; Neuendorf, 2002, p. 10). On the other hand, a qualitative analysis is enriched by historical context and the researcher's standpoint (Clifford & Marcus, 1986; cf. Fürsich, 2009). Riley's column, when analyzed for its coded racial and gendered messages, could be analyzed as a criticism of black women.

Textual analyses go beyond manifest meanings to discern "implicit patterns,

assumptions and omissions" that signify the "ideological and cultural assumptions of the text," usually in the service of dominant groups (Fürsich, 2009, p. 240). Of interest is not the text itself but what it signifies (Curtin, 1995). The goal is "decenter[ing] the text to deconstruct it, working back through the narrative's mediations of form, appearance, rhetoric, and style to uncover the underlying social and historical processes, the metalanguage that guided its production" (Curtin, 1995, p. 11).

In analyzing the racial overtones and undertones of the columns written by African Americans, this study followed the textual analysis tradition begun by British cultural scholar Stuart Hall and his fellow researchers (1975). They treated British newspapers as literary and visual texts that "employ symbolic means, shaped by rules, conventions and traditions intrinsic to the use of language in its widest sense" (1975, p. 17). Their analysis of language and rhetoric as well as style and presentation enabled them "to get behind the broad distribution of manifest content to the latent, implicit patterns and emphases":

> We wanted to bring to light, not the direct and explicit political or social appeals the newspaper made, but the structures of meaning and the configurations of feeling on which this public rhetoric is based (p. 16).

Their literary-critical, linguistic, and stylistic methods revealed the latent meanings but preserved "something of the complexity of language and connotation which has to be sacrificed in content analysis in order to achieve high validation" (p. 15).

In many circles, Hall's work is considered separate from discourse analysis, where the term denotes more than a qualitative measure of language use. It often

encompasses "a related collection of approaches to discourse, approaches that entail not only practices of data collection and analysis, but also a set of metatheoretical and theoretical assumptions and a body of research claims and studies" (Wood & Kroger, 2000, p. x). The existing perspective of the researcher – and not the research questions – determines which analytical tool will be used (Alba-Juez, 2009; Curtin, 1995; van Dijk, 2009a). Even though they share neo-Marxist roots, textual and discourse analysts often differentiate themselves because of the latter's emphasis on the researcher's standpoint and the meaning found in the text's microstructures – e.g., headlines, source use, rhetorical style (Curtin, 1995).

To answer specific research questions on race in texts, this research turned to critical discourse analysis:

> **RQ2:** Collectively, how do elite black columnists write about race?
> **RQ2a:** How does race inform their approach to the news?
> **RQ2b:** Which themes or frames emerge in their columns about race?
> **RQ2c:** What role does race play in the Pulitzer Prize-winning entries of black columnists?

Teun A. van Dijk, the pioneering critical discourse analyst, builds from those linguistic elements to construct a sweeping indictment of global racism, and the news media's complicity in social inequality. Van Dijk, Norman Fairclough, and Ruth Wodak are leading proponents of critical discourse analysis (CDA), offering decades of work on how discourse empowers the dominant and drives racism. As an ideology and a social practice, racism "manifests itself discoursely" (Reisigl & Wodak, 2001, p. 1).

In terms of the news media, CDA begins with a macro-level perspective of domination or social inequality to learn how it is "translated" at the micro-level into the everyday routines of news-gathering and editing (van Dijk, 1991, p. 48). For instance, CDA revealed how Orientalism drives the media's perspective on the Middle East, as expressed through editorials on Iran's nuclear policy (Izadi & Saghaye-Biria, 2007). CDA involves a structural analysis of the text: its pragmatic, linguistic, and rhetorical structures. The superstructure of the individual text includes not just linguistic forms but also headlines, use of sources, graphic design, etc. The structural analysis is followed by a contextual analysis that decodes the messages along historical and ideological lines. In his analyses of the news media, van Dijk (1991) finds that social or political structures inform the meaning or organization of news reports, including commentary, and "news reporters may in turn contribute to the formation or change of social cognitions of the readers or the reproduction or legitimation of power of elites" (p. 45).

CDA differs from other forms of discourse analyses by emphasizing cognition – here, domination's work on the conscious expression or application of racism, sexism, etc. CDA analysts argue that social cognition is the empirical and theoretical "missing link" between dominance and discourse (Alba-Juez, 2009, p. 240). Discourse plays a fundamental role for this cognitive dimension of racism. Thus, prejudices and ideologies "are not innate, and do not develop spontaneously in ethnic interaction," but through discourse, are "acquired and learned":

> Such racist mental representations are typically expressed, formulated, defended, and legitimated in discourse and may thus be reproduced and shared within the

> dominant group. It is essentially in this way that racism is "learned" in society (van Dijk, 2002, p. 146).

In the news media, some opinions and points of view are ignored: "The discourse itself becomes a 'segregated' structure" (van Dijk, 1993). The less powerful are "less quoted, less heard, and less spoken about; their 'voices' are blocked" (Alba-Juez, 2009, p. 243). In particular, van Dijk (1987, 1992, 1993, 2002, 2009a) conceptualizes ideological coverage in an Us vs. Them configuration, in which "subtle structures of meanings, form, and action, racist discourse generally emphasizes Our good things and Their bad things, and de-emphasizes (mitigates, hides) Our bad things and Their good things" (2002, p. 148; 1998, p. 33). This "ideological square" applies to racist domination and the general polarization of in-group vs. out-group social practices, discourse, and thought (van Dijk, 2002, p. 148). In particular, van Dijk (2002) outlines some of the ways that news reports, especially commentary, can be structured to present bias about minorities:

- Lexicon: word selection that may be negative about Them, or positive about Us (e.g., "welfare mother" vs. "struggling mother").
- Local (sentence) meaning: vagueness about Our/white racism but details about Their/black misbehavior.
- Global meaning: positive topics (like aid or tolerance) for Us, and negative ones (crime or deviance) for Them.
- Schematic categories: e.g., a resolution in a narrative schema, or a conclusion in an argument schema that emphasizes Our Good things and Their Bad things.
- Rhetorical devices: metaphor, metonymy, hyperbole, euphemism, irony, etc., that focus attention on positive/negative information about Us/Them.
- Speech acts: including sources that derogate Them or legitimatize Our discrimination (p. 147).

Reisigl and Wodak (2001) operationalize the ideological square with five questions: (1) How are people named and referred to?; (2) How are they described, and which qualities

or characteristics are attributed to them?; (3) Which arguments (explicit and/or implicit) support these characterizations, and/or justify exploiting and discriminating against others?; (4) From whose perspective are such namings, descriptions, and arguments expressed?; and (5) Are articulations explicit or implicit, intensified or mitigated? (p. 44)

Despite its detailed methods of identifying racist discourse, CDA is rarely if ever used to examine how racism can be resisted through discourse. In addition, CDA would be better served if it sought a better understanding of the social actors producing texts and the direct influences on their practices (Carvahlo, 2008). This study agreed with CDA's tenets, including that racism *is* a reality for blacks, and also that discourse does ideological work, is historical, constitutes society and culture, and thus is a form of social action (Fairlough & Wodak, 1997, p. 280). So in terms of methodology, this study proposed an innovative use of van Dijk's ideological square to gauge how black columnists might choose to support or to counter dominant-group perspectives on race, and where they place themselves in an "Us" vs. "Them" conceptualization. And because van Dijk (cf. 1991, 2008) criticizes the dearth of minority journalists (without engaging them in his work), this study enriched CDA by analyzing elite black newsroom voices.

Analyzing the Columns

Because it sought to outline racial discourse by elite black voices, this study analyzed the work of prominent African-American columnists, whose decisions to write about race are informed by newsroom norms but are, at least superficially, more autonomous than most other journalists. (Many conservative African-American

columnists are syndicated but are not based in newsrooms. Their perspectives would be illuminating but present a different line of research.)

For columnists, like all journalists, a tangible measure of prestige is the Pulitzer Prize. The achievement for commentary, first awarded in 1970, is one of fourteen journalism categories. This research analyzed the columns written in the 21st century by African American winners of the Pulitzer Prize for commentary:

- Stephen Henderson, *Detroit Free-Press,* 2014 winner
- Eugene Robinson, *Washington Post*, 2009 winner
- Cynthia Tucker, *Atlanta Journal-Constitution,* 2007 winner
- Leonard Pitts Jr., *Miami Herald*, 2004 winner
- Colbert I. King, *Washington Post*, 2003 winner
- E. R. Shipp: *The New York Daily News,* 1996 winner
- Clarence Page, *The Chicago Tribune* 1990 winner

Added to this list are four current African-American columnists who are on the staffs of the publications with the largest circulation in the country:

- Sandy Banks, *Los Angeles Times*
- Charles M. Blow, *New York Times*
- Jason L. Riley, *Wall Street Journal*
- DeWayne Wickham, *USA Today*

Because of their prestige and/or employment at high-circulation publications, these 11 journalists comprise an elite group of African-American columnists.

Two databases were used to gather most of the columns: Lexis-Nexis and ProQuest. For syndicated columns, the research mostly relied on the columnists' home publication; that is, *Chicago Tribune* columns on ProQuest were the primary source for Clarence Page, whose work in such publications as *The Buffalo News* also appeared on

Lexis-Nexis. Publication websites like nytimes.com or latimes.com confirmed headlines, artwork, and paragraphing and to settle any inconsistencies or mistakes in the database.

To answer the first RQ – in general, what do elite black columnists write about? – the research gathered columns in a variety of ways to ensure a broad reading of texts and the most complete findings. First, the columnists' work was read in blocks of years. Even though this research focused on racial commentary, examining a year's worth of columns allowed a more dimensional and chorological narrative to emerge from the journalists' work. Four specific years were chosen for their particular general and racial newsworthiness: 2001, which included the Richard Ashcroft nomination for attorney general, the execution of Timothy McVeigh, the missing intern Chandra Levy, and of course, the September 11 terrorist attacks; 2005, which included a Michael Jackson molestation trial and Katrina's devastation of New Orleans; 2008, which was dominated by Barack Obama's election as the first African-American president of the United States; and 2012, when the killing of the unarmed black teenager Trayvon Martin spawned national protests and when President Obama was re-elected. In addition, Katrina coverage spilled into 2006 and the Trayvon coverage continued through 2013, so columns about those topics from those years were included. Four columnists spanned 2001, 2005, 2008, and 2012: King, Page, Pitts, and Wickham.

A second method for gathering columns was used because Blow, Riley, and Henderson did not become columnists until 2008. So an overwhelming majority of their columns from 2008 to 2012 were examined.

Third, to compare the columnists' Pulitzer pieces with their overall body of work, the analysis included the columns written in the year of their Pulitzer entries. For instance, Pitts won the Pulitzer in 2004, so his 2003 columns were included in the analysis. Fourth, in the rereading of columns, compelling topics or events emerged or led to other events whose significance had waned but were important to this research – for instance, the columnists' frequent commentary on "Southern strategy" and "the N-word." The most significant of these events involved Harvard scholar Henry Louis Gates, whose 2009 arrest precluded class as a motivating factor. Therefore, database searches were conducted to find columns about the Southern strategy, the N-word and the Gates arrest.

Because most of these columnists wrote twice a week – annually yielding about 80 to 90 columns – the combination of years provided more than enough material to analyze. The total for each columnist and the main years analyzed:

- Sandy Banks, *Los Angeles Times:* 269 columns, 2001, 2005-2012 (reporting stints interrupted column writing).
- Charles M. Blow, *New York Times:* 273 columns, 2008-2012.
- Stephen Henderson, *Detroit Free Press:* 263 columns, 2008-2013.
- Colbert I. King, *Washington Post*: 262 columns, 2001, 2002, 2005, 2008, 2012.
- Clarence Page, *Chicago Tribune*: 380 columns, 2001, 2006, 2008, 2012.
- Leonard Pitts Jr., *Miami Herald*: 353 columns, 2001, 2003, 2005, 2008, 2012.
- Jason L. Riley, *Wall Street Journal:* 363 columns, 2008-2012.
- Eugene Robinson, *Washington Post*: 239 columns, 2005, 2006, 2008, 2012.
- Cynthia Tucker, *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*: 342 columns, 2001, 2005, 2006, 2008 (column ended in 2011).
- E. R. Shipp, *New York Daily News*: 398 columns, 2001-2006 (column ended in 2006).
- DeWayne Wickham, *USA Today*: 185 columns, 2001, 2005, 2008, 2012.

Each column was coded for various categories, with the first being the

commentary's central "topic" (see Appendix A). A topic might be GOP politics, or more specific, Mitt Romney; it could be public education, or more specific, the debate over charter schools. In answering RQ1a – How does having a local or a national assignment guide the work of black columnists? – these categories were sorted by the columnists' beat. The local columnists were Sandy Banks in Los Angeles, Stephen Henderson in Detroit, Colbert I. King in the District of Columbia, E. R. Shipp in New York, and Cynthia Tucker in Atlanta/Georgia. The six other columnists wrote columns that covered national and international trends.

The columns were analyzed to determine whether they included personal, biographical, and/or historical information. Their style and tone were also analyzed but usually were found to be less significant.

To answer the research questions on race, the columns were first categorized by whether they included an explicit or implicit mention of race, and whether race was the central theme of the column. For instance, Robinson and Tucker wrote environmental, nonracial columns about Katrina before the hurricane hit land; then they and the other columnists focused on the intersection of race and class, evidenced by the scenes from the Superdome and of looting. In later coverage, a columnist might mention blacks in the Superdome in a column that centered on Bush's competence. Implicit mentions included names, expressions, or passages that allude to black America, as the following paragraph about Washington D.C. does:

> Jones is involved in the part of our city that lies beyond the National Mall and our downtown federal treasures, the neighborhoods of Washington that tour buses

> rarely see – the places where raw is routine. She grapples with the castaways: children neglected by mothers steeped in dope and TV soaps, children who get short shrift from bureaucrats too busy buzzing on their cell phones or whatever crutches help get them through the day (King, 2001, April 21)

An implicit mention also might include such black language or lingo as "Can we talk, sistergirl?" (Page, 2005, January 16). This categorization noted when columns were written about race because of a news event, as an angle of coverage, or when the columnists wrote about race with no obvious news angle and elevated the topic of race to newsworthiness.

RQ2a – How does race inform their approach to the news? – also sought to identity the journalistic and rhetorical tools the columnists used in discussing race. The research turned to further categorization suggested by critical discourse analysis (Reisigl & Wodak, 2001; van Dijk, 2002). But this study analyzed "Them/Other" as the speaker in racial discourse, with "Us" usually being addressed as the reader. The columns on race were measured for the scope of the racial discussion, the language, the argument style, their sources, the role of history and biography, etc., to take in account resistance or support of hegemony.

Taking an iterative approach, the coding and categories were a starting theoretical point (Tracy, 2013; Lindlof & Taylor, 2011). Columns were read and reread not just for content but to lead to the consideration of additional theoretical frameworks that may help explain the findings.

To answer RQ2b – Which themes or frames emerge when black columnists write about race? – the columns were read multiple times and categorized by their major

themes. Previous research on columns (Golan, 2010; Campbell & Wiggins, 2014) indicated that any themes or frames might be apparent and comprise the columnists' main argument.

In order to answer RQ2c – What role does race play in the Pulitzer Prize-winning entries of black columnists? – which was designed to examine the role race might play in the Pulitzer Prize-winning entries of columnists, the analyst read the complete entries by the eight winning columnists, including the ones written by the late William Raspberry, who won in 1994.

ELITE IN-DEPTH INTERVIEWING

This study also employed a kind of qualitative, in-depth interviewing called elite interviewing to answer the following research questions:

> **RQ3a:** How do elite black columnists describe their sense, if any, of duality?
> **RQ4:** How do black columnists describe writing about race?
> **RQ4a:** How does thinking about their readership influence their writing about race, and vice versa?
> **RQ4b**: How do elite black columnists discuss racial discourse, and their role in shaping it, in their own words?

The goal of these interviews was to analyze the columnists' own words and perspectives about race, any perceived duality about their ethnicity and their profession as well as their perceptions about their readers and how those perceptions might affect their commentary (See Appendix B).

In-depth interviewing, an enduring, invaluable tool in the social sciences, has proven to be an effective method in media sociology to discern how journalists think

about news and their role in producing news. In his seminal study, Breed (1955) talked to journalists to learn that newsrooms use "osmosis" to maintain social control, just one example of how qualitative interviewing articulates "physically unbounded social realities" (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011, p. 175). Interviewing has been employed to understand then express the struggles of black journalists in white mainstream newsrooms (Wilson, 1991; Newkirk, 200; Pritchard & Stonbely, 2007). Whether the interviewee produces a positivist representation of himself or a reflection of a dominant point of view, researchers in both traditional and critical modes of inquiry find such interviews useful (Lindlof & Taylor, p. 180).

In-depth interviews "scratch below the surface" by relying on the interviewees' words "to provide insight, fill in the texture, capture the nuance" as they explain their behavior and perspectives (Poindexter & McCombs, 2000, p. 204). When these interviews are unstructured, they "sacrifice uniformity of questioning to achieve fuller development of information" (Weiss, 1995, Kindle location, 153-154) and help reveal "how people define their realities" (Fortner & Christians, 2003, p. 351).

Lindlof and Taylor (2011) suggest using one-one-one interviewing to get an understanding of the subject's experience and perspective through stories, accounts, and explanations, with close attention paid to language (p. 173). The interviewees are chosen for their subjective standpoint, with the accuracy of what they say – in relation to "facts" of a case – of little concern (p. 179). In fact, they are most beneficial when exploring "change, novelty or uniqueness" of a topic (Poindexter & McCombs, 2000, p. 269).

These respondents are generally prized for who they are as much as what they know. Such interviewees are treated with a particular methodological approach of one-on-one interviewing called "elite interviewing." Elites are people who are universally considered "the influential, the prominent and the well-informed" (Dexter, 1970, p. 6).

But elite interviewing has many obstacles. It is usually "impractical, unrealistic or too expensive to bring opinion leaders or decision makers together as a group" (Poindexter & McCombs, 2000, p. 269). However, individual elite interviews are difficult to conduct because the respondent's position creates barriers between him and the researcher or provides little time within a packed schedule; researchers put in as much effort in securing the interview as preparing it (Dexter, 1970; Mikecz, 2012). McCracken (1988) suggested that eight to ten is a sufficient number to interview for in-depth interviewing (p. 17).

Dexter (1970) anticipated the importance of social construction by stressing that interviewing elites is not a search for objective truth (Littig, 2009). In addition, he stresses that uniformity is not the goal of elite interviews, in which "an exception, a deviation, an unusual interpretation may suggest a revision, a reinterpretation, an extension, a new approach" (p. 6). Therefore not all elites are assumed "to be equally important" (p. 6).

In terms of the researcher's subjectivity, McCracken (1988) believes that well-designed in-depth interviews are "deliberately designed to take advantage" of a qualitative researcher working in his or her own culture (p. 11). But even more than the

typical respondent interview, in which the researcher gently guides the conversation, the researcher conducting elite interviews must be prepared to yield power to the subject. To Dexter (1970), elite interviewing dynamics all tip to the interviewee, who is encouraged to (1) define the situation; (2) structure the account of the situation, (3) introduce, to a considerable extent, his notions of what he regards as relevant, instead of relying upon the investigator's notion of relevance (1970, p. 5).

Criteria for Interviews

Interviews with the columnists would allow them to explain the role of race in their work. Institutional Review Board approval was received to interview the columnists and identify them by name (see Appendix B). IRB protocol was followed. These discussions were heavily influenced by the analyses of their columns before the interviews. The columnists were allowed to take the interview into any direction they desire, but a set of IRB-approved questions was designed for all of them. To answer RQ3 – What do black columnists say about their place in the newsrooms – the columnists were asked:

> On a scale of 1 to 10, how much autonomy do you believe you have in writing a column? Why did you pick that number? Does that number change when your column is about race? Why? Talk about the role of the newsroom, if any, when you write about race.

To answer RQ3a – How do black columnists describe their sense, if any, of duality? – the columnists were asked exactly that:

> Let's talk about duality for black journalists. [A prompt if needed] In the early 1990s, a black journalism scholar [Clint Wilson] wrote that the perceived paradox for black journalists is: are they journalists who happen to be black,

> or blacks who happen to be a journalists? What do you think of that statement? Does it pertain to you? If so, which factors make one concept more crucial than the other at any given time? How do you think your colleagues or your readers would respond to this quote-unquote paradox?

To answer RQ4 – How do black columnists describe writing about race? – two questions were asked of the columnists:

> What factors motivate you to write about race? For instance, is it news-driven? On the other hand, what discourages or makes you less interested in writing about race?
>
> Describe how writing a column centered on race is similar or different from writing other columns. I'd like to discuss some specific columns…

Two research questions were designed to ask columnists about racial discourse – writ large and small. RQ4 – How does thinking about their readership influence their writing about race, and vice versa? – focused on their immediate audience. The columnists were asked:

> How would you describe your audience? How, if at all, does it change when you write about race?

In addition they were asked to choose which role they play for their white readers, among them, educator or dialogue coach.

To answer RQ4a – How do elite black columnists discuss racial discourse, and their role in shaping it, in their own words? – interviews included questions about the state of racial discourse, how it had evolved, and how their participation in it.

The textual analysis and the in-depth interviews were designed to present a dimensional picture of these elite participants in the country's racial discourse. The textual analysis allowed for manifest and latent understandings of the text. Critical

Discourse Analysis, a specific kind of textual analysis, is usually designed to help the researcher pinpoint ideology's role in discourse, and has previously been used to unearth racism in the press, particularly as the news media take an "us" vs. "them" approach to covering minority groups, offering decades of work on how discourse empowers the dominant and drives racism. But this research used CDA for a different purpose: to see *if* and *how* elite black columnists might turn the "us" vs. "them" perspective on its head as they comment on race for mainstream white audiences. In addition, elite, in-depth interviews with the columnists allowed them to talk about race and provide details that are not evident from content analysis alone.

Chapter 6: Analysis of Columns

This study examines racial discourse from the perspective of the elite African American columnists, who are presumed to have the platform and the autonomy to comment on race in America and shape the national conversation about the race. Textual analysis and critical discourse analysis were used to answer the first two research questions, which primarily asked what black columnists write about, and how they specifically write about race. The findings are presented in five sections: (1) an examination of the topics that columnists write about, including a categorization of the work based on their beat assignments, with special attention given to Jason L. Riley, the sole conservative columnist, and the columnists' work on the Jeremiah Wright controversy in 2008; (2) the columnists' deployment of a black American narrative; (3) the crucial role of biography in the columnists' work and in the narrative; (4) the identification of six frames that served as arguments and writing tools in their commentary on race; and (5) an analysis of the Pulitzer Prize-winning columns for their racialized content.

COLUMNISTS' TOPICS

The first research question asked: In general, what do black columnists write about? The news cycle, obviously, is a driving factor. This century's opening decades experienced domestic and global terrorism, natural disasters, four presidential elections and increased support for gay marriage. Race itself often was the focus of the news, including such memorable events as the emergence and election of Barack Obama as the

first African-American president in 2008, and the shooting of Trayvon Martin in 2012. Local columnists also commented on these national stories. In fact, local and national columnists wrote frequently about race and saw the news through a racial lens. They even wrote columns in response to their readers' reactions to their writing about race.

Yet none of these columnists wrote exclusively about race and instead commented on an array of topics, often depending on their beat.[11] A significant newsroom factor in determining their chosen topics was whether the column was dedicated to local issues and people, or whether it was written for a national publication like *USA Today* or is syndicated for a national audience (See Table 1). *The Washington Post's* Eugene Robinson focuses on the White House, Congress, national issues and national politics; the Washington D.C. he covers is a different place from his *Post* colleague Colbert I. King, who writes a column about the District of Columbia issues and people. Leonard Pitts Jr., who is based in Washington, officially writes for *The Miami Herald* but is known as a nationally syndicated columnist whose work appears across the

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11 A total of 3,327 columns were read at least once. Some columns, especially those of syndicated columnists, were repeated and were counted only once.
Sandy Banks, *Los Angeles Times* (269 columns, 2001, 2005-2012)
Charles M. Blow, *New York Times* (273 weekly columns, starting in 2008)
Stephen Henderson, *Detroit Free Press,* 2014 winner (263 columns, starting in 2008)
Colbert I. King, *Washington Post*, 2003 winner (262 weekly columns, starting in 2001)
Clarence Page, *The Chicago Tribune* (380 columns, starting in 2001)
Leonard Pitts Jr., *Miami Herald*, 2004 winner (353 columns, starting in 2001)
Jason L. Riley, *Wall Street Journal* (363 columns, starting in 2008)
Eugene Robinson, *Washington Post*, 2009 winner (239 columns, starting in 2005)
Cynthia Tucker, *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* (342 columns, starting in 2001; ended in 2011)
E. R. Shipp, *New York Daily News* (398 columns, starting in 2000; column ended in 2006)
DeWayne Wickham, *USA Today* (185 weekly columns, starting in 2001)

Table 1. The Columnists: Their Beats, Their Perspectives
Based on the analysis of their work, these columnists were categorized by their major beats, their tones and/or perspective and recurring, additional themes they wrote about. All the columnists except Jason L. Riley would best be described as liberal.

Columnist	Main Beat	Tone/Perspective	Additional Topics
Sandy Banks, Los Angeles Times	Los Angeles lifestyle and issues	Personal style; Prism of family, single motherhood	Education; Government agencies
Charles M. Blow, New York Times	National: politics, policies	Visual columnist: Using numbers, polls, studies	Social justice; White conservatism
Stephen Henderson, Detroit Free Press	Detroit financial crisis and issues	Native son in evolving city in crisis	Dysfunctional city; Forgotten Detroit; Black responsibility
Colbert I. King, Washington Post	District of Columbia issues	Native son as watchdog; voice of the voiceless	Legal and juvenile justice system; "Other Washington"
Clarence Page, Chicago Tribune	National: Politics and policies	Experienced, older point of view	Racial discourse; class and race; Cosby and black responsibility
Leonard Pitts Jr., Miami Herald	National: politics, zeitgeist	Culture and politics; racial and liberal causes	Justice; racial discourse (the N-word); white privilege
Jason L. Riley, Wall Street Journal	National: politics, policies	Detached but conservative	Pro-immigration; Misguided liberalism
Eugene Robinson, Washington Post	National: politics, zeitgeist	Detached but liberal perspective	Myth of a black monolith; culture; environment
E.R. Shipp, NY Daily News (ended in 2006)	New York, national issues	Personal, Watchdog; voice of the voiceless	City politics and leadership, crime and police; race
Cynthia Tucker, Atlanta Journal-Constitution, (ended in 2011)	Atlanta/ Georgia, then national politics	Southern liberal voice of reason	Voter suppression; Failing leadership; Conservative strategies
DeWayne Wickham, USA Today	National: politics, policies	Black perspective; foreign policy	Race; US-Cuba policies; black-on-black crime

country and is expected to appeal to a national, rather than a South Florida, audience. To answer RQ2a – How does having a local or national beat influence the choice of topics – the analysis examined the columnists by their assignments.

National Columnists

Six columnists – *The New York Times'* Charles M. Blow, *The Wall Street Journal's* Jason Riley, *The Miami Herald's* Leonard Pitts Jr., *The Washington Post's* Eugene Robinson, *Chicago Tribune's* Clarence Page and *USA Today's* Dewayne Wickham – covered national news and topics and storylines like presidential and midterm elections, trends in U.S. politics and national policy, and to various extents, foreign policy and international news, especially as it pertained to the War on Terror, or the Syrian and Iranian crises. Wickham wrote frequently about thawing U.S.-Cuban relations.

The national columnists traveled to such major news events as national party conventions, the Gulf Coast in the aftermath of Katrina, and Florida during the Trayvon Martin story. In 2008, they wrote about Obama as a politician, but all except Riley expressed pride after his first election and frustration at conservative efforts to racialize him. Although immigration was not a leading category, it is worth noting that Riley, author of a pro-immigration book, frequently wrote about the Republican Party's misguided policies and attitude toward immigration (see The Conservative Columnist).

Six related topics dominated their coverage: (1) election coverage and campaigning; (2) the partisan politics of Washington and (3) its effect on national policy-

making on health care, education, and immigration specific election coverage; (4) national conservatism as a political and discourse trend, which many saw feeding white extremism; (5) national psyche and zeitgeist, with pop culture a frequent vehicle, and (6) race, not only through the five other themes but also as a separate category, including racial dialogue; discussions on the N-word, the significance of black culture and black holidays.

The first three categories are political and included the three presidential elections, various primaries, Congressional fights and shutdowns, Supreme Court confirmation hearings, and the debates over the War on Terror and the Affordable Care Act. In 2008, focus shifted to white voters – not as the default but as a distinct voting demographic. Another major theme was commentary about conservatism beyond horse-race discussions of politics. All the national columnists monitored the rise of the Tea Party – and its treatment toward President Obama – as well as its threat to GOP political stability. Blow attended a Tea Party rally in Texas and noted the "minstrelsy" of diversity on the stage, not in the audience where he sat (2010, April 16). Unlike local columnists, the national journalists were more likely to critique the Obama presidency and policies. Wickham (2009, August 11) and Blow noted that despite conservative accusations, Obama's policies had not been favorable to blacks. Early in the Obama's presidency, Blow commented: "The Age of Obama, so far at least, seems less about Obama as black community game-changer than as a White House gamesman" (2009, December 4). His presidency could be seen, or not seen, along racial lines. Page commented:

> We think we're voting for candidates, but we're really voting for narratives, the grand epic presidential story that we hope will come true. Obama offers us yet another case of a winner whose narrative is turned unfavorably on its head by his presidency. He has a year to turn his story around or, at least, hope his opponent spins a narrative that sounds even worse. (2011, October 14).

Because these are national columnists with great latitude, they often write about mood – the country post-9/11, the holiday season, the primary season. They are everymen taking the pulse of America, and its interest in sports, music and other forms of pop culture.

"Race" emerged as a separate category because they all wrote extensively on race relations and racial discourse, even before Obama emerged. As Pitts wrote in one of his frequent columns about race and column writing: "I wrote 98 columns last year. By my count, 24 of them — one in four — had to do with race. It's a typical tally and one I'm quite comfortable with" (2003, January 24). In 2005 and 2006, they wrote extensively about Katrina and the intersection of race and class (see Katrina and Race). Black popular culture was another frequent topic. Page and Pitts, the former music critic, routinely found rap indefensible (e.g., Page, 2001, February 18; Pitts, 2003, October 27). Pitts praised *12 Years a Slave* and *The Butler* for their truer history of black America (2013, August 8; 2013, August 27; 2014, March 5). Blow (2010, February 26) and Robinson cringed at black filmmaker Tyler Perry's movies, but Robinson also noted that Perry provided what black consumers wanted: movies in which they were not "magical Negroes," black characters serving as moral and spiritual guides for white protagonists (2007, October 16).

The Conservative Columnist

Because Jason L. Riley of *The Wall Street Journal* is the sole political conservative of the 11 columnists, it is important to give special attention to his work, and not only as a contrarian to the others being analyzed here. A member of *The Journal's* editorial board, long known for its conservatism, Riley has been writing print and online columns since 2008. This analysis examined 363 pieces, most of them written after 2009, appearing online and in the 300- to-500-word range. He wrote about national issues, especially Capitol Hill and the White House, partisan politics, and elections. He followed state political races when they affected Congressional control or if the candidate had national ambitions, like New Jersey Governor Chris Christie. Like other national columnists, he followed President Obama, the 2010 and 2012 campaigns and elections. He also followed such events in New York City as its mayoral election and its stop-and-frisk policies, which he supported.

Riley's perspective aligned with such conservative values as supporting smaller government and charter schools while criticizing affirmative action, gun control, minimum wage, unions, and most other liberal policies. Unlike the other black columnists, he was not concerned whether the War on Terror infringed on civil liberties, arguing that President Obama would "blow you to pieces with a drone but says interrogating you at Gitmo is a human rights violation. Figure that one out" (2013, March 12).

Riley rarely used first person and never referred to himself as African-American, but he regularly appears in videos on *The Journal* website. He often wrote about race in

ways that might have come across as inflammatory if he were white. For example, Riley decried black voter support for President Obama:

> The black illegitimacy rate last year was 72%. Might it be that having a black man in the Oval Office is less important for black advancement than having one in the home? (2012, November 5)

Yet Riley joined the other columnists in frequently writing about issues concerning black Americans. He frequently wrote about the crisis for poor urban schools, with several columns praising Washington, D.C.'s Opportunity Scholarship Program, a school voucher program (e.g., 2009, May 8; 2011, May 3). He also addressed weak black leadership; the need for black responsibility; black-on-black crime, and the flawed discourse on race. But unlike the other columnists, he used those topics to criticize President Obama and Democrats, repeatedly arguing that blacks were misguided to have faith in liberal policies and in fact were being harmed by the black president they overwhelmingly supported. In his view, the liberals had hijacked racial discourse. In a column on embattled U.N. Ambassador Susan Rice, Riley claimed:

> Liberals complain that America isn't post-racial. But given how hard they work to keep race front and center in our national discourse, you get the sense that they wouldn't have it any other way. (2012, November 21)

His column on May 8, 2009, illustrates his main points on race. It opened: "Does President Obama care more about black criminals than black schoolchildren?" Riley argued that the president was wrong to support reduced sentencing for drug crimes while opposing charter schools, even though "repeated studies have shown an inverse relationship between educational attainment and the likelihood of incarceration:"

> But even if the administration achieves its objective, what has been accomplished? As Bill Cosby once quipped: "OK, we even it up. Let's have a big cheer for the white man doing as much time as the black man. Hooray!" Mr. Cosby's point was that the real travesty is not the treatment of black criminals; it's their prevalence.

He concluded: "So, does Mr. Obama care more about criminals than kids?"

> Of course not. He just cares most about not upsetting a hugely important liberal special interest group that helped elect him and other Democrats. The raw political calculation is that poor black parents will forgive him long before the National Education Association does. (2009, May 8)

Riley neither praised nor criticized the Tea Party. In one interview, he quoted fellow conservative writer Walter Williams was quoted as calling the Tea Party "a positive development" and "long overdue" (2011, January 22). Riley disagreed with those, especially the NAACP, who considered Tea Party racist and anti-Semitic:

> Given that the tea party — a diffuse network of local groups with no central leadership — focuses not on race but on limited government, the NAACP's obsession with the movement might seem odd. And given the real challenges facing black Americans today, the fact that the nation's largest civil rights group is devoting time and resources to monitoring Sarah Palin rallies for Confederate flags is also rather sad. (2010, October 25)

Riley, like *The Journal*, was pro-immigration; his biggest disagreement with the Republican Party and conservatives was their stance on immigration. A September 1, 2012, column after the Republican convention, is emblematic of his standpoint. Riley, who has written a pro-immigration book, noted that "rare was the speaker … who did not invoke his immigrant forebears, almost always described as poor or, at best, of modest means upon arrival to the U.S.":

> This is hardly surprising because we are not simply a nation of immigrants but overwhelmingly a nation people descended from immigrant strivers. The "huddled

> masses" of the 1800s and early 1900s were tired and poor, not Indian computer engineers and Chinese biochemists.
>
> This point is worth making because although the Republican speakers were trumpeting their downtrodden immigrant parents and grandparents, the Republican platform calls for, among other things, reforming our immigration policies in a way that encourages high-skill immigration and discourages low-skill immigration. In other words, Republicans are calling for an immigration policy that would have denied entry to most of those people they were praising on stage this week. (2012, September 1)

Local Columnists

Five journalists, including the three women in this collection, wrote columns usually focused on their city's issues. Sandy Banks at *The Los Angeles Times*, Colbert I. King at *The Washington Post* and Stephen Henderson at *The Detroit Free Press* still write such columns. Two do not: E.R. Shipp, who won a 1996 Pulitzer for her columns in *The New York Daily News*, was let go in 2006; Cynthia Tucker, who won a 2007 Pulitzer for commentary in The *Atlanta Journal Constitution*, became a Washington-based political reporter in 2009 and left that publication in 2011.

Like local columnists of any color, these five journalists were usually concerned with how their cities were run, the people who ran them, and most important, their residents. As *The Post's* Colbert I. King told readers: "The city is my main beat. What the D.C. government does or fails to do and how that performance affects residents, especially 'the least of these' in our community, is my business" (2006, June 3). His summation reflects the four closely related themes that emerged in the local columnists about their cities, ones that not so coincidentally correlate to the concerns of black Americans: (1) dysfunctional city government, including failing schools; (2) weak or bad

local leadership, both white and black; (3) the haves and have-nots in their cities; and (4) racial politics and history contrasted with the changing racial demographics of their cities. To the columnists, these themes often feed off each other.

The first theme, city and state mismanagement, spans across such topics as public education, especially the debate over charter schools, infrastructures like roads and city services. Sandy Banks wrote extensively on problems within Los Angeles schools as well as policy issues within city departments. For instance, she voiced exasperation with a Los Angeles Fire Department anti-harassment policy that ended up causing tattooed firefighters to be harassed (2008, September 27 and June 21). Colbert I. King wrote relentlessly wrote about D.C.'s juvenile and jail system and police work, especially about but not exclusive to their ineffective response on black-on-black crimes. Between 1996 and 2013, he wrote 15 columns in which he referred to bungled police response to the murder of teenager Tia Mitchell, whose death, in his perspective, epitomized the treatment of the have-nots in his city. E. R. Shipp commented on the city's slow institutional and cultural recovery from the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks. She also wrote about the high-profile New York Police Department brutality cases, including the sodomy of Abner Louima. She was a staunch defender of the New York Police Department, especially in its response to change the culture that led to the brutality cases, and a constant critic of local black leaders:

> To seek out instances in which to make a point that all law enforcement is bad — is virtually a conspiracy against the interests of black Americans — while empowering young black knuckleheads to go about their merry, irresponsible and criminal ways does this country no good. (2002, July 21)

Regarding the second theme, these columnists were highly critical of leadership overall, but they were exasperated with most of the black politicians and activists, especially those, who in the columnists' opinion, used race to retain power in these heavily minority cities. Banks wrote of two Los Angeles activists: "Their climb from relative obscurity to being described as 'black leaders' reflects an era of grass-roots activism that relies more on media savvy than intellect or moral stature" (2007, February 13). Tucker was particularly disgusted with black leaders and politicians whom she regularly accused of playing racial politics (e.g., 2001, December 19; 2006, April 5). She even decided that minority Congressional districts were no longer a good idea:

> Unfortunately —like so many measures designed to provide redress for historic wrongs — those racially gerrymandered districts also came with a significant downside: They discouraged moderation. Politicians seeking office in majority-black or —brown districts found that they could indulge in crude racial gamesmanship and left-wing histrionics.
>
> While black-packed districts yielded some respectable pols— including U.S. Reps. John Lewis, D-Ga., and James Clyburn, D-S.C., the third-highest ranking Democrat in the House—they also launched the congressional careers of clownish legislators such as former Rep. Cynthia McKinney, last heard cozying up to savage Libyan dictator Moammar Gadhafi. (2001, June 1)

Henderson found fault with the current Detroit leaders' attempt at handling the city's financial crisis:

> I'd love to believe that with one more chance, one more agreement, the city's political class could get its act together and start digging Detroit out of its financial hole, rather than continuing to dig deeper.
>
> I'd also like to believe in unicorns and gold pots at the end of rainbows, though. (March 3, 2013)

Henderson, however, went to great pains to assert that Detroit's problems were not because of black leadership: "Our biggest problem in Detroit isn't about what color our leaders are, but a crisis of competency among them" (2013, October 28). King compared ex-mayor Marion Barry to a "punch-drunk, over-the-hill fighter, who, at the sound of the bell, comes out swinging if it's just a call for dinner" (2002, March 9). But he considered his successor, Mayor Anthony Williams, out of touch with Washingtonians who did not reside or work downtown (e.g., 2002, August 17). Henderson, on the other hand, wished that Detroit leadership was more like Williams, asserting that: "Today, D.C. is growing—and, in a city where residents once saw video of their mayor begging for a hit of crack, a bond has been restored between the public and public servants" (2012, June 3)

Shipp regularly criticized former Mayor Rudy Giuliani for alienating blacks in New York, an issue which she saw new Mayor Michael Bloomberg correcting with his diverse staff, including Deputy Mayor Dennis Walcott:

> Walcott is black; make no mistake. But when he talks of "community," he means all New Yorkers — something not so apparent in a Giuliani time when "community" has meant cops and firefighters and people in parts of Queens and Staten Island who would not welcome someone who looks like me. (2001, December 11).

Local columnists worked at serving as the voice of the voiceless, concerned about people in less-than-trendy, forgotten neighborhoods, folk often rendered or all but described as people of color. Of Columbia University's attempt to expand in Harlem, Shipp complained: "I don't want to imagine a city where honest and hardworking teachers and sanitation workers and waiters and hospital workers and auto shop workers

cannot afford to live, forced to commute from New Jersey or upstate" (2005, May 8). During the mayoral election in post-9/11 New York, Shipp stressed:

> Too many children live in poverty. Too many are forced to attend schools that anyone with an alternative would not choose. Both Green and Bloomberg must use these next few weeks explaining how "the other New York" factors into their list of post-Sept. 11 priorities. (2001, October 14)

Throughout the decade, Tucker wrote frequently on what she called voter suppression – attacks on the Voting Rights Act and states' voter ID laws – calling them an attack on the poor and poor blacks: "What Georgia Republicans really wanted to do was bar a small group of voters who tend to be rural, isolated, poor and predominantly black. According to many studies, those voters are less likely to own a car and, therefore, less likely to have a driver's license" (2006, June 25)

King was especially galled by the divide in the District of Columbia, evidenced here in a column about a crumbling neighborhood: "Those obscene buildings tell J. C. Nalle [Elementary] kids that they don't count. Because if those girls and boys did 'come first,' as the downtown politicians love to preach, they wouldn't be forced to endure such loathsome buildings year in and year out" (2001, July 28). King compared growing up in a stable, sheltered, mostly racially isolated neighborhood with the damage being caused by gentrification during Mayor Williams' tenure:

> [F]or people experiencing the dark side of urban revitalization, this is not a happy time. There is also a gnawing sense of imposed powerlessness, even among longtime middle-class residents not forced to leave their homes. Listen to the barbershop and beauty parlor talk and you hear it.
>
> They say that this mayor, if left to his own devices, would be more concerned about the comfort and sensibilities of the better off; that the mayor is blind to the history and distinct cultural environment of Washington

> neighborhoods; that he has little empathy for working-class folks and nothing in common with them; that he won't lay it on the line line for folks who can't fight for themselves. Those sentiments, not the loss of trauma care, informed the bitter fight over the downgrading of D.C. General Hospital (2001, May 19).

As the last sentence makes clear, news developments were often seen as part of a larger narrative about these cities, with race and class a central concern for these columnists even if not explicitly mentioned. The fourth theme, on race and history, focuses on the changing demographics that impact racial politics and balances of power. Tucker wrote that the "antics" of black councilwoman "betray[ed] her discomfort" with an Atlanta whose black population had dropped to 61 percent, portending "a subtle shift in the balance of power in city politics":

> In Dorsey's down-at-the-heels district on the city's southeast side, many young whites — singles and couples, gay and straight — have moved in, fixing up old houses, cleaning littered lots, running off drug dealers and spurring retail development. Dorsey could have embraced their civic activism and claimed credit for neighborhood revitalization. Instead, she has alienated them with tactics that smack of intolerance and narrow-mindedness. (2001, May 2)

Yet Tucker later wrote that Atlanta's public schools were "still underachievers" because "the new middle-class migration has been fueled mainly by young singles, gays without children and empty-nesters" (2001, June 13).

All (Racial) News Is Local

In answering RQ1a – How beats might affect the topics that black columnists write about – the research also found that local columnists were not restricted to writing solely about matters pertinent to their cities. As expected, they all commented on the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks and the fear that hung over America. But local columnists also

commented on other national stories, including presidential elections, Supreme Court nominations, the Terri Schiavo right-to-life controversy in 2005 and, of course, Barack Obama's emergence and election as the first African-American president.

In fact the local columnists often wrote about racialized stories far from their cities. For instance, the death of Coretta Scott King, the widow of Dr. Martin Luther King, was not just a topic for Cynthia Tucker, who followed the Atlanta-based King family and called the widow the Jacqueline Bouvier Kennedy for black women of her mother's generation (2006, Feb. 1). Mrs. King's death prompted columns from Shipp, Colbert I. King, Robinson, Pitts and Page. Shipp wrote about Essie Mae Washington, Strom Thurmond's black daughter (2003, December 21). Before Obama's election, Tucker, Shipp, and King viewed the Cabinet appointments of Colin Powell and Condoleezza Rice as racial achievements. Shipp commented on Rice:

> And I never thought I'd see a black person become the secretary of state in these United States, the fourth in the line of presidential succession. Or a black person who happens also to be a woman become the national security adviser. But times, they are a changin'. (2000, December 19)

Shipp, like other columnists, followed Rice regularly through "the prism of race" (2004, April 11). Although these columnists usually wrote only one piece on other national stories, they commented on Obama's campaigns extensively in 2008 and 2012. Crucially during Obama's first campaign, the local columnists did not consider him a black leader or merely a politician but a symbol of black and, importantly and American pride. Early on, they marveled at the first legitimate black presidential candidate whose race seemed almost besides the point. Tucker was typical in her praise:

> Obama's insistence on defying stereotypes has been at the core of his popularity. He is bright, sometimes boring, often engaging, thoughtful, occasionally cranky, visionary, usually well-informed, sometimes slightly self-righteous. And black. Always. He is a presidential candidate who happens to be black — not a black presidential candidate. For those of us eager for America to grow into a mature accommodation with its racial diversity, that's refreshing, hopeful, reinvigorating. (2008, January 6)

In 2008, Colbert I. King, who frequented used the term "Billary" for the Clintons, complained that Bill Clinton, not Obama, had closer ties to Louis Farrakhan, the anti-Semite Nation of Islam leader (2008, March 1). Four years later, King compared the vitriol directed toward President Obama to what Lincoln faced before his assassination and likened Mitt Romney to Andrew Johnson, calling the 2012 presidential election "one of the most important political events to affect racial progress" (2012, November 3).

Viewing Obama Through Jeremiah Wright

The research also found that local and national columnists took similar approaches to discussing the Rev. Jeremiah Wright, Obama's former minister who was video-recorded preaching controversial and anti-Semitic remarks. The remarks surfaced in early March, but none commented until after Obama gave his "A More Perfect Union" speech on March 18. In this context, the columnists saw Obama turn his campaign's first major negative into a historic plus. The candidate's handling of the Wright controversy was assessed in glowing terms, "a landmark speech" that "established new parameters for a dialogue on race in America that might actually lead somewhere" (Robinson, 2008, March 19). Tucker wrote that he "handled it with courage and candor and grace," delivering a speech that was "true to the essence of his claims about his candidacy"

(2008, March 19). Wickham called the speech a rare moment in which a politician was moved "by unselfish courage, rather than political expediency, to address the nation" (2008, March 23).

Pitts, Robinson, and Tucker praised Obama for not only his nuanced discussion of race but also refusing (at that time) to disown Wright, whose comments they too repudiated. The speech marked what these black columnists (mistakenly) saw as hope for racial dialogue that they sought. As Pitts wrote: "You see, we just lost the last excuse for our inability to talk about race. Last week in Philadelphia, Barack Obama showed us how" (2008, March 23). However, the columnists overall feared that such a "pander-free" speech would damage Obama (Tucker, 2008, March 19).

In fact, the columnists' vision of race in America aligned with Obama's rhetoric. Robinson, as Obama had done in his speech, directed African Americans toward what the columnist called talking points:

> Don't be paralyzed by history but acknowledge its effects. Recognize that whites have legitimate grievances that are not racist. Don't cling to victimhood as an all-purpose excuse. Accept personal responsibility. (2008, March 19)

Wright became a to-be-pitied symbolic bit player, representing how blacks could be wounded by but mistaken about America. Tucker reminded readers, as Obama had, that the minister had fought in Vietnam; Pitts, King, and Robinson told readers of the vital role of the black church within the community, where "the pastor is given much leeway, so long as the church is held together as a family" (King, 2008, March 22). King wrote about the founding of a black church in the 1780s after black parishioners were no

longer welcomed in a white church (March 22, 2008).

When a defiant Wright resurfaced in April to speak at the National Press Club in Washington, but Robinson and Page ran out of patience, with Robinson writing that he was "through with Wright" because of his egocentricity (2008, April 29). In denying Wright's claim that attacking him was an attack on the black church, Robinson relied on a familiar theme: the black church, like black America, was not monolithic (2008, April 29). More urgent to these columnists was the damage Wright was doing to Obama's campaign, with Robinson claiming that the pastor was "throwing Barack Obama under the bus" (2008, April 29). Page warned that Wright might have "single-handedly done enough damage to make sure Obama never gets to the Oval Office anyway. If so, Wright probably will blame the white man for the defeat, but the rest of us will know who helped" (2008, May 4).

THE USE OF A BLACK NARRATIVE

The Wright columns are instructive in answering RQ2, which asked how do black columnists write about race. Overall, the textual analysis found that the columnists refashioned the news of the day as the tip of the iceberg regarding the black American experience. The columnists portrayed Obama's allegiance to his pastor as not just personal but as indicative of the longstanding importance of the black church in the black American identity. The events that provoked these journalists to write about race were given an historical context and then reshaped to fit their narrative of what it means to be black in the United States. Specifically, the narrative is black striving toward equality.

The history of black America, as well as their personal stories, construct a narrative identity of black America that is juxtaposed with the mainstream (i.e., white) narrative of news and history.

But the columnists did more than just reference the past. *The Miami Herald's* Leonard Pitts Jr., in particular, used his column as an opportunity not only to recover what he called The Truth but also uncover its significance in the everyday lives of today's African Americans:

> Black America is a creation of white America; it is what happened when all those disparate peoples were pressed together at gunpoint and whip's edge into something wholly new. But if black was created by white, it was defined by the people who were required to live the role. They brought to it bass ostinato from the music of Africa, okra from the gardens of Africa, words and sentence structures from the languages of Africa, soul truths from the very bones of Africa. What is black? It is the tension, the violent collision, between those things brought from home and those perceptions imposed from without. It is the fight to hold on to one's very self in the midst of it. (2010, February 14)

All 11 columnists contributed to what could be called a narrative identity of black America that is a historical sense of self. The shooting of Trayvon Martin and the not guilty verdict for his shooter, George Zimmerman, fit into the narrative, as part of what the columnists called the enduring criminal injustice that black men face. For instance, The *New York Times'* Charles M. Blow connected Martin's killing to events within the narrative: "Unfortunately, these sorts of defining moments keep coming. I have James Byrd Jr. My parents had Emmett Till. My children have Trayvon Martin" (2013, December 19). *USA Today's* DeWayne Wickham saw Florida's Stand Your Ground laws, at the center of the Martin story and the Jordan Davis shooting later in 2012, as

having the "stench of Jim Crow justice" (2012, December 2). Although Martin's death raised the specter of Jim Crow South, some columnists were adamant in pointing how life had significantly changed for black Americans since the high-profile murder of 14-year-old Emmett Till in Mississippi in 1955 (e.g., Robinson, 2012, March 23).

In a more positive example, many wrote that they did not expect a black man to be elected president in their lifetime, however they turned to the promise of the Constitution and American ideals to make such an event plausible; Wickham called Obama's nomination "the third epoch" of American history (2008, August 19). In essence, the columnists constructed a particular narrative identity of Black America that, unlike the damaged discourse they said haunts African Americans, was not monolithic but forever bound to the first slave ships that landed in 1600s Virginia.

To these columnists, today's triumphs and struggles of black Americans could not be disconnected from their past, and should not be separated the history of America and the history of race in America. In a column about the Mississippi flag's use of the Confederate war symbol, Shipp is both historical and biographical: " 'Mississippi is a hard old state,' one of my kinsmen, a former slave, wrote to his former masters in North Carolina shortly before World War I" (Shipp, 2001, April 24). Again, Pitts was notably emphatic, declaring:

> For the record: America's economy was once balanced on the free labor of African-American people. America's most ruinous war was fought for the freedom of African-American people. America's greatest social movement was to secure citizenship rights for African-American people. America's wars, its culture, its science, its struggle to vindicate its founding promise, have always featured —often in prominent roles —African-American people. (2005, July 1)

The day of Obama's historic election, Robinson mused: "African Americans' love of country is deep, intense and abiding, but necessarily complicated. At the hour of its birth, the nation was already stained by the Original Sin of slavery" (2008, November 4). In addition to the first slave ships, readers were frequently reminded of Crispus Attucks, the former slave and the first casualty in the fight for American independence (e.g., Pitts, 2010, February 7); Frederick Douglass, the Civil War, Booker T. Washington and W.E.B. Du Bois; lynchings, Jim Crow and segregation; the historian G. Carter Woodson, who founded "Negro History Week," the predecessor to Black History Month; the classic Civil Rights Movement as well as counter-mainstream invoking of Martin Luther King Jr. far from the March on Washington dais; the Southern Dixiecrats who battled integration in the 1950s and 1960s and Republican Party's Southern Strategy of luring white Southerners through race-baiting. In fact, these columns are directed at whites readers, part of what indeed could be labeled as a loose-knit anti-racist racial project to rename and reclaim racism in the 21st century.

The notion of these historic figures and events was as important to the columnists' arguments as contemporary statistics and sources. In arguing that the word "Negro" should remain a census category, Banks declared: "The names we choose to call ourselves are more than labels, after all. They're signposts on our journey":

> They reflect our mind-set, our history, our longing to shore up our presence in a country that doesn't always seem to want us.
>
> I have the freedom to declare myself unashamedly black because the generation before me navigated overt racism and hostility with Negro strength and vision. (2012, March 12).

Blow, criticizing the 2012 Republican presidential candidates' views on welfare, commented that "race is usually less about facts than historical mythology, which evokes the black bogyman, who saps the money from the whites who earn it. Ever since blacks first arrived on these shores in chains, they have been perceived as lazy and dependent on whites — first as slaves, and then as 'entitled' citizens" (2012, January 6). Following the public reaction to Rosa Parks' death and a salute to Condoleezza Rice at a University of Alabama football game, Tucker wrote:

> The news media played it as if it were a routine turn of history — a natural outgrowth of a civil rights movement that overturned the cultural status quo — but there is nothing "natural" about Parks' elevation to civic sainthood. Nor is there anything routine about Rice's ascension to secretary of state a mere 42 years after four little girls were blown up at church, in Rice's hometown of Birmingham, for the sin of skin color (2005, November 6).

On the mail she received on immigration, Tucker wrote that "others sprinkle enough uses of they and them and those people in their missives to remind me of the rhetoric used by white Southerners who resisted desegregation in the 1960s" (2006, May 14). In discussing black views on the immigration debate, Page brought up that at the turn of the 20th century Booker T. Washington and W.E.B. Du Bois "called for sharp limits on immigration until the descendants of American slavery could be fully employed" (2006, June 4).

'This Nation's Original Sin'

These columnists emphatically advocate the need for white America to own up to its past. In 2010, Mississippi Governor Haley Barbour said honoring Confederate History Month without mentioning slavery was acceptable. *The Post's* Eugene Robinson's

responded, “Slavery was this nation’s Original Sin, and yet many people will not look at it except through a gauze of Spanish moss”:

> The Atlantic slave trade was one of the last millennium's greatest horrors. An estimated 17 million Africans, most of them teenagers, were snatched from their families, stuffed into the holds of ships and brought to the New World. As many as 7 million of them died en route, either on the high seas or at “seasoning” camps in the Caribbean where they were “broken” to the will of their masters.
>
> If he has never done so, Barbour should hold in his hands some of the leg irons, manacles and other restraints that were used to subdue the Africans. … He should read the accounts of plantation life written by former slaves, and then he should explain why there is any reason to “honor” soldiers who fought to perpetuate a system that could never have functioned without constant, deliberate, unflinching cruelty (2010, April 13).

Pitts (2001) often chided his white readers for what he considered a naïve view of black America and unwillingness to confront the past:

> Stop talking history, they say. Don’t bring up my father’s sins. Concentrate instead on all the things that are wrong in your community here and now.
>
> As if those pathologies had come from nowhere, appeared fully formed one sudden day, had no earthly connection to eight generations of slavery and three more of Jim Crow. (2001, June 23)

But they also saw the need for blacks to gain a better understanding of their past. For instance, Shipp was dismayed that after the death of Mamie Till Mobley, patrons at a barbershop did not remember Emmett Till, whose murder was a key initial event in the modern Civil Rights Movement. Shipp told the patrons and later her readers that Till, as his mother put it, “ ‘was the sacrificial lamb of the movement.’ A sacrifice we as Americans should never forget because of our obligation to know how we got where we are now in this racial wonderland — the good, the bad, the horrible and the empowering” (2003, January 12).

The findings show that the bane of these columnists was ahistorical readings of slavery and other key moments in the American, not just, black American, timeline. They took such slights quite personally and projected them to all African Americans, as King did here in referring to two new Bush cabinet members, Gale Norton and Colin Powell:

> Norton, who downgrades slavery to simply "a bad fact," contended in her speech that when the Confederacy lost the Civil War, "we lost too much." About Norton, let us say no more, except I doubt her "we" includes me.
>
> Have a nice Cabinet meeting, Colin Powell. (2001, January 13)

Inserting Race Into the News

In answering RQ2a – How does race inform the work of black columnists – the research found that the African-American experience was often a reference point regardless of the subject matter, even when race (or class) was the not central narrative in mainstream media. A 2013 Charles M. Blow column in *The New York Times* centered on Syria's poisoned children, but he criticized America's blind eye toward forgotten children all over the world, including those facing hunger and violence in America. Blow, who never mentioned race in the column, concluded: "Yes, let's remember and mourn and be motivated by the dead children in Syria. But let's also not forget all the other dead children of the world, including our own" (2013, September 6). King used the occasion of Mark Felt's "Deep Throat" disclosure to remind readers of the former FBI official's role in its pursuit of Martin Luther King Jr. (2005, June 4) and that a black guard had disrupted the Watergate break-in (2005, June 11). Wickham compared Michelle Wie's competing against male golfers to breaking the color line in other sports (2005, July 19). Robinson

(2005), Tucker (2005), Shipp (2005, 2001) and King (2001) noted that energy spent on missing white women resulted in bad journalism, inappropriate police efforts, and a dual system of justice. Following the attention to missing vacationer Natalee Holloway, Robinson wrote of cable's obsession:

> A damsel must be white. This requirement is nonnegotiable. It helps if her frame is of dimensions that breathless cable television reporters can credibly describe as "petite," and it also helps if she's the kind of woman who wouldn't really mind being called "petite," a woman with a good deal of princess in her personality. She must be attractive — also nonnegotiable. Her economic status should be middle class or higher, but an exception can be made in the case of wartime (see: Lynch). (2005, June 10)

Shipp (2001, July 10) and King criticized the attention given to Congressman Gary Condit's missing intern, Chandra Levy, in 2001, with King noting in a column about have-nots:

> The policing situation is so dire … that a recent Ward 7 double homicide was not fully investigated, because there weren't enough detectives available. And, he said, the lack of police coverage is all the more galling to crime-weary residents who see their Fort Dupont Park saturated with a mass of police cadets searching for a missing intern (2001, July 28).

Blackness imbued the perspectives the columnists shared with readers, as columns following the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks. The journalists wrote of America's shared pain and fears. But importantly, this was not a colorblind America but one despised for its diversity. Leonard Pitts Jr.'s column published on September 12 became part of 9/11 patriotic narrative, reprinted around the world:

> Did you want to tear us apart? You just brought us together. Let me tell you about my people. We are a vast and quarrelsome family, a family rent by racial, social, political and class division, but a family nonetheless. … We are fundamentally decent, though — peace-loving and compassionate. We struggle to know the right

> thing and to do it. And we are, the overwhelming majority of us, people of faith, believers in a just and loving God. Some people — you, perhaps — think that any or all of this makes us weak. You're mistaken. We are not weak. Indeed, we are strong in ways that cannot be measured by arsenals. (2001, September 12)

Tucker did not mention race in her Sept. 12 column, which ended: "Today we grieve for everything we have lost, including our innocence." But three days later, she called for her readers "to resist efforts to lessen our civil liberties," recalling the internment of Japanese Americans during World War II and the FBI pursuit of Martin Luther King Jr. She noted that "our tolerance, openness, our religious and racial diversity" were reasons the terrorists hated America. Colbert I. King wrote that Americans learned, "women, children and people of all ages and races are fair game in the eyes of terrorists" (2001, September 16).

Subsequent ethnic profiling during the War on Terror was seen from the perspective of historically oppressed people. A November 2001 headline for DeWayne Wickham's *USA Today* column summed up the perspective of all the columnists: "Even Terrorists Have Civil Rights" (2001, November 27). But the columnists turned to the attacks when racial animus reappeared, noting that for all the inclusive talk following 9/11, perhaps little had changed for black America. For Halloween 2001, two fraternities at Auburn University dressed up as KKK members lynching frat members in blackface and mocked a black fraternity, causing Cynthia Tucker (an alumnae of the school) to ask: "Who said Sept. 11 changed everything? Couldn't those beer-soaked lads have satisfied their need for sick humor by lynching an imaginary Osama bin Laden?" (2001, November 11).

Six months after the attacks, Shipp replied to a reader who was "sick of the whining and complaining by your race. We don't owe you a thing." She wondered in her column:

> There's all this talk of "getting along" and "understanding each other." And, of course, we keep saying we won't let the terrorists even think they can defeat us because we are so committed to our American-ness.
>
> But is there more than the words and music?
>
> …Too many people who are blessed to live in this country are more intolerant than the worst of the terrorists our nation and its allies are now pledged to rid the world of. They presume that because they see a photo accompanying this column that shows me to be a black woman, that I am indistinguishable from black thugs, black radicals, black politicians, black cats, black boots. They stop at the black face. (2002, March 12)

Clarence Page never mentioned race as he reminded fearful readers that Americans in violent urban neighborhoods lived in terror long before the attacks. He quoted the leader of a national community-building center as saying: "Ground zero is happening every day for the grass-roots people we work with in violent neighborhoods … Every day is their version of Afghanistan" (2001, November 7). A Colbert I. King column, "Welcome to the Club," published on October 19, 2002, during the height of the Washington D.C. sniper fears, makes an explicit connection between race and terror. It exemplifies how a black columnist could use history and biography to racialize a story that at the time was not racial (the killers were assumed to be white). White fear is given a black context as he explained to his white readers the ways African Americans then and now coped with hatred and specter of death on a regular basis. Note how the first-person shifted throughout the column:

> [F]or me, my siblings and our elementary and junior high school classmates, any

> notion that our little world was free from danger was dispelled early in our childhoods. …And the threats we faced during that postwar era were not only from overseas.
>
> Here's another anxiety-producing fact that, until Sept 11, 2001, most of us never had to think about: We are despised by some people in this world, and not because of anything we might have said or done. We are hated simply because of who we are, and what we represent, at least to those who wish us ill.
>
> … But my generation is no stranger to that kind of uncalled-for hostility.
>
> Imagine learning from your parents that in the country to which you pledge allegiance each school day, there are millions of people who want no part of you or anyone who looks like you. Try getting your mind around the fact that there are people who dislike being around you so much that they have even created rules — and hired and armed men to enforce them — to keep you out of their schools and theaters and stores.
>
> … Parents today might wonder what they should tell their children about al Qaeda. They should put themselves in the shoes of parents who had to explain to their children the Ku Klux Klan, Emmit (sic) Till, four little girls in a Birmingham church and a shooting at the Lorraine Motel in Memphis.
>
> … It's worth remembering that huge numbers of children in our inner cities, and in war-torn cities around the globe, still cope every day with a sense of vulnerability as bullets sing around their ears. Long before the sniper took up arms in this area, many of our children struggled daily to keep fear from consuming their young lives. Their little slice of America is not now and never has been safe.
>
> So, to the newcomers to uncertainty and danger, I invite you to join those of us who know all about living with a keen sense of peril.
>
> Your older fellow Americans of a darker hue (to crib a line from author Stephen Carter) have been doing it for a long, long time. Welcome to the struggle. Welcome to the club ('hood). (2002, October 19)

Interestingly, King won the Pulitzer Prize for commentary written in 2002, but this column was not among the ten entries.

The black narrative emerged when columnists proclaimed their patriotism before 9/11 and a decade after it. In early 2001, Pitts wrote that he loved his country for a number of reasons, including because no one forced him say so (2001, February 17). Two months before the terrorist attacks, Shipp wrote that that she appreciated the Declaration

of Independence, sang "God Bless America" alongside new American citizens in her church; she reminded her readers of Franklin Roosevelt's essential human freedoms and warned of the "fanatical Taliban" and their oppression of women. But she added:

> [W]e must acknowledge that there are areas in our nation's life where those "unalienable rights" Thomas Jefferson wrote about in the Declaration of Independence are not fully realized. We need to work on gaining total freedom from the vestiges of slavery and racism. That so many Americans are not free from want is a national disgrace, as are our failing public schools and spotty health care for all but the well-off. (July 3, 2001)

King took Frederick Douglass' Fourth of July question in 1852 — "Are the great principles of political freedom and of natural justice, embodied in that Declaration of Independence, extended to us?" — and referred it to Muslim Americans: "In 2005 the question may be asked once more: Whose Fourth of July is it?" (July 2, 2005).

ROLE OF BIOGRAPHY

In answering RQ2b – which also sought to examine which journalistic or rhetorical tools might be employed in columns about race – the research found that personal stories were crucial to the arguments that these columnists made. Technically, these 11 journalists are best described as reportorial news columnists, which means they use such traditional reporting tools as sources, surveys, and research in their argument (S. G. Riley, 1998). While *The Wall Street Journal's* Jason L. Riley provided few personal details about his life, columnists are usually expected to be more open about their lives than reporters, as these columnists were. To be sure, the columnists wrote about moments in their lives from the nonracial perspective: King grudgingly spending the day at a spa (2001, November 24), Pitts writing on his daughter's first crush, on Justin

Timberlake (2001, March 15), Tucker's father dying of colon cancer (2006, April 2). Banks' column, designed to be personal from a woman's perspective, often assumed the persona of a widowed, working mother of two girls whose life reflected the world writ large, and vice versa. Banks wrote about getting a medical marijuana prescription — and flushing her "medicine" down the drain (2008, April 26 and May 3). She wrote about the illness, recovery and death of the family pet (e.g., 2008, April 12, April 15, and August 19).

Colbert I. King and Stephen Henderson write columns in the cities where they grew up, lending authority to their opinions and perspectives. In writing on today's Washington D.C., King often recalled yesterday's District of Columbia, especially drawing on what he considered his humble roots in a stable black neighborhood. Henderson, who returned to Detroit to write a column and serve on the *Free Press* editorial board, often wrote about his darkened street because of Detroit's broken streetlights. But he also saw his presence in the city as part of Detroit's solutions:

> As a kid, I never really noticed that my city was on the ropes, that people were fleeing by the hundreds of thousands….
>
> Now, my kids are growing up here, too, and the most common question I'm asked by others is: Why? How can I make a rational case for living in a city with so few services, such unappealing educational choices, so depressing a swirl of crime, poverty and absurd neglect?
>
> Without question, I see value in giving my kids the same experiences I had growing up, in seeing them jump and laugh and play in places where my footsteps weren't so long ago washed away.
>
> But there's also value in standing in, staying and fighting for Detroit, raising a family here just so there are more families living here, paying taxes, boosting normalcy (2012, June 8).

Crucially, their personal stories and autobiographies were important tools in

writing directly and indirectly about race. By telling their own stories, they provided proof of their authority on the subject of race and showed how they embodied the narrative of black America.

They had lived under Jim Crow (King, Tucker, Robinson, and Shipp); come from single-parent homes (Blow); had lived in "the projects" (Pitts, Wickham, Henderson, and Shipp); and had police officers point guns at them (Blow and Pitts). They had benefited from exposure to policies, institutions and teachers who took interest in them, the kind of black self-reliance seen as missing today (Henderson and Blow). And they pointed out that the black American experience is also the American experience (King, Shipp, Tucker, Pitts). King wrote about being in elementary school in 1950 and marching in President Eisenhower's inauguration parade with his Boy Scout troop, surprised to see the president waiting for the "colored troop" at the rear of the parade (2001, January 20). There was contemporaneous pride when Obama won the 2008 election, with even the usually detached Eugene Robinson moved by what the moment meant to his parents:

> I did lose it, minutes before the television networks projected that Barack Obama would be the 44th president of the United States, when I called my parents in Orangeburg, S.C. I thought of the sacrifices they made and the struggles they endured so that my generation could climb higher. I felt so happy that they were here to savor this incredible moment. (2008, November 6)

Yet Robinson and other columnists are old enough to remember segregation firsthand. While the headline on his column for the second inauguration read "President Obama, defined by race no longer," Robinson disagreed:

> Reaction to the address took remarkably little notice of the fact that Obama is an African American. That seems to be old news.

> Not for me, though. Not for a black man who grew up in the segregated South, who attended a rally (my mother tells me) at which the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. spoke, who lived through the defeat of Jim Crow and the triumph of the civil rights movement. (2013, January 21)

Tucker and Shipp wrote frequently about growing up in the Deep South during segregation. Tucker recalled one near-disaster with her mother:

> I remember whites-only waiting rooms, water fountains and toilets. I remember when my parents, both of whom had graduate degrees, earned less than their white counterparts. And I remember when black passengers were routinely ordered to the back of the bus. Taking a commercial bus line through Hayneville, Ala., notorious for its bigotry back then, my mother and her 4-year-old (me) were ordered to move to the rear to make room for white passengers. I refused — not because of the injustice of the demand, to which I was oblivious, but because I liked the seat. My mother, all the more terrified because of her obstinate, protesting preschooler, dragged me to the back. (2005, November 6)

Banks, who grew up in Ohio, remembered segregation's sting:

> I am the daughter of a man whose family fled Georgia with a lynch mob on its heels, and a mother born and raised in Alabama who had to swallow her pride and explain to her young Ohio-bred daughters why we couldn't use the department store restroom on a visit to her hometown, because it was for "white ladies only." (1999, July 4).

Their personal stories could counter the mainstream account of events. King" corrected" a *Washington Post* article on the historic designation given to a local park:

> [T]his might be the moment to add a little color to the Glen Echo amusement park story, at least as it's chronicled in my mind and The Post's own news clips.
>
> Glen Echo may well have provided fun-filled days for many area residents. But from its inception as an amusement park in 1911 until 1961, Glen Echo amusement park was, for Washington-area African Americans, exactly what a "white only" lunch counter was to our cousins, aunts and uncles in the segregated Deep South: strictly off-limits. In fact, apart from the segregated D.C. public schools I attended, Glen Echo amusement park may have been one of my earliest introductions to government-sanctioned discrimination in public accommodations. (2007, February 9).

The personal stories also enhanced or filled a gap in mainstream coverage. Sometimes local columnists wrote about the deaths of little-known black figures whom they thought deserved more citywide attention (e.g., Shipp, 2002, May 28). While John H. Johnson, publisher of the black magazines *Jet* and *Ebony*, had received mainstream obituaries, black columnists indicated that "adequate attention had not been paid" to Johnson (Shipp, 2005, August 14). Shipp wrote that *Jet* and *Ebony* "were always a part of my life – and that of many black families and black barbershops and black beauty parlors" (2005, August 14). Wickham remembered adults at his South Baltimore housing project gathering to look at *Jet's* "ghoulish" image of Emmett Till's body at his funeral, which "got fleeting coverage in the white press" (2005, August 16).

The columnists also used the death of white mainstream artists to point out their impact to African-Americans – and at the same time, blending the columnists in American culture. Shipp (2003, June 15) and Tucker used the occasion of Gregory Peck's death to tell their affection for Atticus Finch of *To Kill a Mockingbird*. (Tucker readers were often reminded that she hailed rom Monroeville, Alabama, the home of *Mockingbird* author Harper Lee.) Shipp pointed out how John F. Kennedy Jr. "endeared himself to blacks in many ways — including his choice of a wedding site. He evaded international paparazzi by quietly wedding Carolyn Bessette in 'a tiny white clapboard church — a former slave chapel with only a handful of benches and no electricity…' When you're black, you somehow see such acts as an affirmation of yourself" (2002,

May 5). After actor Andy Griffith died, Pitts wrote from the perspective of a Mayberry resident even though he acknowledged that "our town" had no black people (2012, July 7). Shipp praised Johnny Cash after the musician died: "A black woman enjoying Johnny Cash? You bet. Johnny Cash was the champion of the working class and the downtrodden and a griot of Southern culture. If you are Southern, especially middle-aged and older, your life's experience was probably captured in his songs" (2003, September 14).

Biography was important in discussing the black American home life. Page, writing about poverty, wrote that his father once explained that his family was broke but not "po'."

> "Po' folks don't know when they're gonna eat again," he said. "I have a job. When I get paid, I won't be broke no mo'."
>
> … I must have been in college before I discovered that, according to sociologists, our family was "the po'!"
>
> And, yet, we were rich in spirit. (2005, September 28)

But Page, like many of the columnists, grew up in a two-parent home, reinforcing the frame of black responsibility: "I had loving, hardworking and dependable parents at home, which meant I was blessed. We had an optimism about our future that kept us from feeling as poor as many of the po' folks whom I have covered during my decades as a journalist" (2005, October 2). To counter readers who oppose public policies that help poor children, Tucker repeatedly reminded her readers of her good fortune of having a stable childhood:

> Before I was conceived, I did an exceptional job of choosing my parents.

> Sitting there in Elysium or wherever I was before conception, I decided to be born to black parents in the segregated South. But I didn't want to be severely limited by my circumstances, so I chose a young couple who were married, employed, had graduate degrees, who were unburdened by alcoholism or criminal history. (2005, January 30).

Charles M. Blow told a different story: "Occasionally, without warning, the drunken wreckage of my father would wash up on our doorstep, late at night, stammering, laughing, reeking of booze" (2011, June 17). When he was younger, suffering from depression because of his parents' divorce, he so struggled in school that he was sent to a "slow class" and proceeded to "live down" to expectations even though his mother was a teacher. In fourth grade in a new school, Mrs. Thompson, her smile, and her encouragement turned him around:

> I couldn't remember a teacher ever smiling with approval, or putting their hand around me, or praising my performance in any way.
>
> It was the first time that I felt a teacher cared about me, saw me or believed in me. It lit a fire in me. I never got a bad grade again. (2011, September 2)

The newly inspired Blow ended up in a class for gifted students and became his high school valedictorian and freshman class president at Grambling University — where, he also wrote, he was hazed as a band member, relevant to the high-profile Florida A&M hazing death (2011, December 9). Biographies like Blow's were important for signaling how little it would take to improve the lives of black children in crisis. Blow's redemption pointed to the role of community in the narrative. Their stories were particularly important in voicing their support for policies like affirmative action.

Arguing that race should be a factor in college admissions, Shipp opened her column: "I was born colored. You can see it on my birth certificate":

> I was born in the Negro —or Nigra —wing of the hospital in Conyers, Ga. Ask my mama. From the beginning, race has been a factor in my life.
>
> It was a factor when I helped integrate Rockdale High School. It was a factor when I helped maintain the integration of the University of Georgia.
>
> But three federal judges said the other day that race cannot be a determining factor in decisions about who else will attend that university. (2001, September 2).

The headline for one Henderson column simply read: "I am affirmative action." He retold how he landed his first newspaper job during the early 1990s.

> I'd been a cracker-jack summer intern and the paper had never — *never* — had an African American on its editorial board. The paper's parent company waived the freeze and helped pay my salary as part of a program aimed at increasing minority presence in newsrooms.
>
> More than 20 years later, a writing and editing career that has spanned five cities and been recognized with more than a dozen national awards culminated in last Monday's announcement that I had won the 2014 Pulitzer Prize for commentary.
>
> Opportunity, based at least in part on race, opened the door to that career. That is what affirmative action means. (2014, April 23)

Some wrote of personal tragedies, used to give heft to their arguments. In pleading for black children to stay in school, Banks wrote of her grandmother, who spent "60 years spent on her knees, scrubbing floors for rich, white families, or standing for eight hours at a time, inspecting sparkplugs on an assembly line" (2001, January 14). Pitts did not support the death penalty even though his brother-in-law had been murdered (2003, June 17). In 2002, *The Daily News'* Shipp proved that sexual abuse was not confined to the Catholic Church:

> I identify with the people coming forward to ensure that their stories force reforms to protect kids in the future. In my childhood —I am a Baptist who grew up in a rural town in Georgia —the abuser was a deacon who lived across the street from my family. Mama was impressed with his piety and his interest in giving me Bible lessons.
>
> The deacon across the street always told me to keep quiet, that what he did when he touched me was our secret. I didn't tell mama about this until a few years ago, but it didn't take me very long with the deacon to start finding excuses for staying away. Mama thought I was losing interest in the Bible, and it was easier to let her think that. (2002, March 20)

Significance of Religion

It is noteworthy that Shipp framed her abuse in terms of her religious beliefs. For the overwhelming majority, their distinct personal lens aligns with liberal, human secular perspectives. But nine columnists (again, all but Wickham and Riley) frequently mentioned being practicing Christians; they quoted Scriptures, gospel lyrics, sat in church and spoke directly to or wrote about God in their columns. When conservatives criticized Coretta Scott King's raucous, political funeral, Page and Colbert I. King wrote about growing up in the Southern black church (Page, 2006; February 12; King, 2006, February 11). "That's the way it often is at black Baptist home-going services," King wrote, adding that unlike white funerals, "Black Baptist services, on the other hand, historically have tended to be longer, elaborate, more spontaneous and a time to 'get it said.' That's what was going on in Atlanta" (2006, February 11).

But they all emphatically stressed separation of church and state. King, "a lifelong Christian," argued that conservatives were wrong to attack stores that promoted "Happy Holidays" rather than "Merry Christmas" (2005, December 10). Tucker, who described

herself as a "left-leaning Christian" in two columns, wrote that Rep. Paul Ryan and other religious conservatives could "deify" atheist writer Ayn Rand "if they choose. But, for heaven's sake, don't call that "Christianity":

> In truth, the 40-year marriage of religious and fiscal conservatives has always had deep fissures, contradictions, cognitive dissonance. Despite claiming the "small government" mantle, many actually support an invasive government that wields religion as a sword. They want a government that intrudes in the bedroom, that grants its imprimatur to heterosexual marriage, that gives preferential treatment to Christian practices in pluralistic public spaces (2011, June 8).

Shipp, who frequently mentioned attending Abyssinian Baptist Church in Harlem, and other columnists brought up their beliefs while explaining their skepticism of President Bush's faith-based initiatives for social services in 2001. But Shipp added: "Black Americans, perhaps more than most, have long looked to their churches, and more recently, mosques, as centers of communal life" (February 13, 2001). Overall, their faith did not prevent them from supporting liberal causes like gay marriage. Banks, a Christian, said that after Obama's election and California's reject of gay marriage in 2008: I felt proud of my nation and ashamed of my state" (2013, June 28). As Pitts put it: "I read The Book. I believe The Book. But I also know that it's impossible to take literally every passage in The Book, unless you want to wind up in prison or a mental ward" (2003, August 4). Pitts and Tucker frequently criticized the conservative appropriation of religion, especially what Tucker called its "war on science" (2005, May 15). The columnists wrote that the black church needed to come to grips with black gays, and their lack of support was dangerous in the age of AIDS/HIV. They wrote with an insiders' point of view, as Robinson did in 2005:

> It's time for the black church in America to come to terms with homosexuality. Pastors, come down from the pulpit and get to know your choir directors.
>
> No, I'm not saying that all or even most of the choir directors in all or even most of the black churches in the country are gay. I'm just reporting that in my observation, at least, music has long been one of the accepted roles for "confirmed bachelors" in African American congregations. I'm noting that it's fairly common for a preacher to deliver a thundering "Adam and Eve, not Adam and Steve" sermon and then turn to a gay man to lead the church in a rendition of "One Day at a Time." (2005, August 2)

The narrative deployed by these columnists served as a historical, biographical, and personal window into the black American experience. Black America's history and personal biography greatly shaped the way black columnists wrote about race, and helped shape their response to racial and nonracial events. As Henderson wrote: "I live in the city where I was born, so I'm used to jarring reminders of how my own history converges or deviates from the path Detroit has taken over the past four decades. The city's triumphs, lost opportunities and even horrible misfortunes all have personal touchstones for me, all over town" (2013, December 4).

Although they acknowledged that Obama's election did not signal the end of racism, they saw America being changed by the demographics and political clout of people of color. On the eve of Obama's election, Tucker noted this evolution on the narrative journey:

> … I was born in Alabama shortly after the Supreme Court ruled against segregated schools. I remember the culture of Jim Crow, which dictated that black school children were too dumb to deserve new school books and that my parents, both black teachers, were too inferior to deserve the same wages as their white counterparts. Despite the Supreme Court's ruling, I attended separate and unequal public schools most of my life.
>
> I do not mourn the passing of that America.

That America, Tucker declared, "is passing away."

> The monochromatic America of Christian prayers before football games and New Testament scriptures read in fifth-grade classrooms; the America of all-white juries, an all-white Congress and all-white classrooms; the America of gay men denied security clearances out of fear they could be blackmailed and young pregnant women dying from coat-hanger abortions; the America of George Wallace, Phyllis Schlafly and Anita Bryant — that America recedes before a new tide.
>
> I do not mourn its passing. (2008, October 29)

FRAMES OF THE BLACK NARRATIVE

In answering to RQ2b – Which themes or frames emerge in columns about race? – the analysis found that the columnists employed six frames that made sense of the black American narrative and shaped their argument for how race should be approached in America. Because they were tied to a historical narrative of black America, the frames were thematic, not episodic: they were used to provide broader context and to find patterns that explain the black American condition. Three addressed historical symptoms: (1) the unique, devalued black life and the accompanying social and economic injustice; (2) misrepresentation, including the myth of the monolith; and (3) destructive racial discourse, which not only includes animus toward Obama but also black and white usage of the N-word. Three frames provided solutions: (4) raising critical racial consciousness, including unmasking white privilege and domination; (5) black responsibility and self-reliance; and (6) faith in Constitution and American ideals (See Table 2). These frames were directly tied to the argument of their columns and were explicitly expressed. Riley (conservative) and Pitts (liberal) often employed the damaged racial discourse. Riley uses

Table 2. Frames of the Black Narrative and Black Experience
The columnists drew upon six frames that reflect their narrative of black America. This chart lists the frames, the ways they manifested, and representative news stories.

CONTINUING BLACK DIMINISHMENT		
Frames	**Manifestations**	**Symbols/News Stories**
Unique Devaluation of Black Life	Social, economic and criminal injustice; unique black American (slavery as America's original sin)	Martin story and Zimmerman verdict, Gates arrest, need for affirmative action; Conservative work like voter "suppression"
Misrepresentation (related to discourse)	Myth of Black Monolith; invisibility; race/class divide; black conservatism	Martin story; Bennett remarks on blacks and abortion; Imus remarks on Rutgers women
Destructive Racial Discourse (related to misrepresentation)	Myth of post-racial America; animus toward Obama and blacks; "race card" and "racism"	Black History Month and Martin Luther King Day; Obama and Holder remarks on race; columns on race
KEYS TO BLACK PROGRESS		
Frames	**Manifestations**	**Symbols/News Stories**
Raising Critical Race Consciousness; Unmasking Whiteness	Countering claims about racism and color-blindness; white privilege	White voters; white female victims; columns on race
Black Responsibility; Self-Reliance	Black-on-black crime; black leadership; nostalgia; pride	Black-on-black crime; leadership; Cosby debate; families in crisis
Constitutional Reverence	Promise of American ideals; black patriotism	Rice and Powell appointments; Obama election; Zimmerman verdict; civil liberties

the frame to criticize liberal policies that he sees hurting black America externally and internally, while Pitts sees discourse and misrepresentation as rendering young black men as invisible menaces.

These frames are not exclusive and overlap within the narrative: Black America has been damaged by a unique racial history that predates the founding of the United States. But black Americans are full citizens deserving of equal rights and fair representation. While it might not have been their intent, these columnists presented black America as a problem – not of its own doing and still needing legislative and cultural solutions.

Most important, the frames are emphatically historical and decidedly African American. On the surface, they might seem contradictory, but they make sense within the narrative. All the columnists except Riley argued that affirmative action is still needed because black life has been devalued for centuries, first in systemic and now more subtle ways. Yet all the columnists, nostalgic for strong black communities, also argued that many blacks must take more responsibility for their lives and those of their children. Page, a proponent of self-reliance, wrote that while institutional racism still exists:

> African Americans will not defeat it through political agitation and legislation alone. We also need to employ the same basic tools that have brought success to countless black families during far worse racial times than these: education, hard work, strong families and high moral standards. (May 23, 2006)

Yet Page also supported affirmative action, paraphrasing Martin Luther King's comment: "Before you can pull yourself up by your bootstraps, it helps to have boots" (e.g., 2003, April 30). The columnists reminded black and white America of its history: either to replicate its results, like the drive and heroism of 1950s civil rights leaders, or, more likely, to stem the tide of repeated injustices, like the fatal shootings of unarmed black youth.

Devaluation of Black Life

The first frame is the devaluation of black life, a term Stephen Henderson of *The Detroit Free Press* used after George Zimmerman was found not guilty of murdering Trayvon Martin (2013, July 15). But Henderson, Tucker, Shipp, and Colbert I. King of *The Washington Post* also relied on this frame is discussing the plight of those in their cities who are denied basic education, city services and the right to reasonable safety in their neighborhoods. The frame is tied to centuries of civil and economic inequities, from slavery to police brutality to unequal distribution of wealth and mobility opportunities. Tucker also tied such Republican policies as voter "suppression" and policies against the poor as being proof of their disregard for black life (e.g., 2006, June 25).

The devaluation frame use was at its most passionate when violence was involved. Henderson made sense of the Zimmerman verdict in the context of the black American narrative, even tying it to the black-on-black crime being committed in his hometown. The verdict, he wrote, "is an awful reminder that the urban violence we see in places like Detroit has its roots in a transcendent axiom that dates back further than the

nation's founding: that black life is cheap, no matter where or how it's taken" (2013, July 15). Almost a decade before Martin's death, *The Daily News'* E. R. Shipp (2003) wrote of Alberta Spruill, a woman who died after a mistaken police raid:

> While shocked at the death of a woman who by all accounts was a salt-of-the-earth, God-fearing, community-oriented person, I was not surprised that such a tragedy could take place. After all, she was a black woman. She lived in Harlem. And life, as Langston Hughes so famously wrote, "ain't no crystal" when you are black and you reside in the Harlems of this country. (2003, June 1)

After Trayvon Martin's killing a decade later, *The Times'* Charles M. Blow also turned to Hughes, calling him a literary father and using his poetry in his own narrative identity:

> "Life for me ain't been no crystal stair." And yet, we must continue to climb, "sometimes goin' in the dark, where there ain't been no light." That poem helped change my life when I was younger. It steadied me when the world was rocky. Maybe today, it can do the same for someone else. (2013, December 19)

After a jury did not find a white man guilty of shooting an unarmed black teenager named Jordan Davis, Pitts articulated the dangers of being one of "them":

> The jury's inability to hold him accountable for Davis' death only validates African-Americans' grimmest misgivings about the "just us" system. Brittney Cooper, an assistant professor at Rutgers University, put it as follows on Twitter: "This is not just about jail time. This is about whether white fear legally means more than black life." (2014, February 18)

The devaluation of black life sets apart African Americans from other minority groups. While comparisons can be made to other rights movements, like gay rights, the black experience in America is like no other faced by a minority group. As Pitts put it: "I hate to play 'my ordeal was worse than yours,' because I think that demeans all our ancestral passages. But the fact is, nobody —with the singular exception of the American Indian —

suffered in this country as African Americans did. Our experience here is unique and uniquely telling" (2005, July 1). After President Obama referred to Seneca Falls, Selma, and Stonewall in his second inauguration, Riley, who subtly showed his support for gay rights, pointed out that "black liberals have complained about equating the current push for gay marriage with a black civil rights struggle that included chattel slavery, lynchings and Jim Crow":

> The president rightly asserted that gays and lesbians deserve equal treatment under the law. But some blacks wish that Mr. Obama were more protective of the black civil rights movement that paved the way for his historic presidency. (2013, January 22)

Henderson turned to the narrative and another frame, constitutional reverence, in trying to find common ground:

> I'm careful not to make crude comparisons between or among civil rights causes and groups, because everyone's history and struggle are so different. The commanding narrative of this nation's history, though, is about its expanding notions of freedom, its efforts to correct past injustices by reaching more perfect interpretations of its founding document, the oldest and most envied constitution on the planet. That's what every civil rights struggle has in common. (2014, March 24)

The frame also encompasses such themes as the unfair distribution of wealth and mobility in America. Henderson and Robinson used the analogy of missing rungs of a ladder in discussing the oppressive immobility of the poorest Americans, usually rendered as black (Henderson, 2014, February 12; Robinson, 2007, November 23). In noting the dangers of unregulated charter schools in Michigan, Henderson sought accountability for Detroit's most vulnerable students:

> The most enthusiastic charter advocates rationalize their unregulated nature by hailing the idea of the marketplace as self-regulating. Bad schools will eventually

close because they have no customers, they say.

> But this doesn't take into account that in the education marketplace, some customers don't have the same kinds of choices that are an intrinsic part of the free-market model — some people are trapped, because of poverty and isolation, in places where all the choices are bad. (2014, June 22)

In a column about a documentary on affirmative action, *Chicago Tribune's* Clarence Page wrote in 2003: "[A]fter showing that race is more of a social and political construct than a biological fact, the series examines why and how race was constructed in America and how your race still can affect your life chances and opportunities" (2005, May 3). As Miami's Pitts wrote about children and youth: "If they begin to understand how inequities could have felt normal 40 years ago, maybe they'll question the inequities that feel normal today" (2004, December 20). He also was adamant in pointing out that the devaluation begins early in black life, as he explained in a column about a white executive who slapped a crying black toddler on a plane and called him the n-word:

> It's easier to get worked up about violence that is visceral and immediate, particularly when it is directed against a child. We will be a better country, though, when we are willing to expend some of that outrage upon the violence we commit against African-American children every day, systemic blows which are at once more subtle, more pervasive and more damaging.
>
> Because the truth of How Things Are is that, over the course of his life, Jonah is likely to be struck many times in many different ways.
> This was just the first. (2013, February 23)

Misrepresentation

The second frame displayed in Table 2 is based on centuries of cultural misrepresentation that renders African Americans as monolithic and/or invisible. If white America's conception of the black American narrative is misinformed, the purpose of

these columnists is to provide counternarratives that set the record straight. It is closely related to the destructive discourse frame, but the focus here is on the actual misrepresentation and not how it is communicated. Pitts writes that it is the cultural invisibility of blacks that causes a George Zimmerman to shoot a teenage boy in a hoodie, while Robinson and Banks blame a monolithic rendering of all black boys as dangerous. In 2005, William Bennett, the former Education Secretary under President Reagan, remarked on the radio: "…I do know that it's true that if you wanted to reduce crime, you could, if that were your sole purpose, you could abort every black baby in this country and your crime rate would go down." Taking him to task were Pitts (2005, October 9), Wickham (2005, October 3), and Robinson, who stressed: "[S]houldn't we conclude that he mentioned only black children because, perhaps on a subconscious level, he associates 'black' with 'criminal'?" Robinson uses his biography to steer the discussion away from the "racist" trope to a deeper, more systemic issue:

> I grew up in the South in the days when we had to drink at "colored" water fountains and gas stations had separate "colored" restrooms; I know what a real racist is like, and Bennett certainly doesn't fit the description. But that's what's so troubling about his race-specific "thought experiment" — that such a smart, well-meaning opinion maker would so casually say something that translates, to African American ears, as "blacks are criminals."
>
> …For hundreds of years, this country was obsessed with the supposed menace of black sexuality and fertility. Bennett's remarks have to make you wonder whether that obsession has really vanished or just been deemed off-limits in polite discourse. (2005, October 4)

Monolithic representations of America has led whites to assume that all blacks are liberal, when in fact these columnists point out (especially after the defeat of gay marriage legislation in California) that blacks are religious and often social conservatives;

Even Riley acknowledges that blacks vote in bloc because the Republican Party fails to reach out to them. The true representation of black America, they all contended, including Riley, could be found in black barbershops and beauty shops (e.g., Riley, 2013, April 12).

Destructive Racial Discourse

The most-used frame of Table 2 was destructive racial discourse, as these journalists often critiqued the profession they have entered, the manipulation of history and tyranny of collective memory, and the conservative discourse reaction to the first African-American president. When Obama secured the Democratic nomination in 2008 and the fears of white voters were being measured, Blow wrote of "the murky world of modern racism, where most of the open animus has been replaced by a shadowy bias that is difficult to measure" (2008, August 9). By the time Obama became president, the columnists called open hostility directed at Obama stunning, disappointing, and divisive (e.g., Blow, 2010, July 31; Wickham, 2009, August 18; King, 2012, September 9; Banks, 2008, November 3 and 6). Banks noted that "our *kumbaya* era has unraveled with stunning ferocity." She recalled the "send Obama back to ... Kenya" comment," Sarah Palin's "patronizing 'shuck and jive' line" about Obama's handling of the Benghazi attack; the guy in the "Put the White Back in the White House" shirt at a Romney-Ryan rally" (2012, November 3). *The Post's* Colbert I. King commented on racism in the 21st century, after a Republican county chairman demonstrated "how new social media platforms can broadcast ancient hates. The Post reported this week that the county GOP's

Facebook page had displayed for months photos portraying President Obama as a witch doctor, a caveman and a drug dealer. Ah, life in post-racial America" (2012, September 29). King brought up a University of Miami student who had posted on Facebook: "If anyone going to UM to see Obama today, get ur phones out and record. Cause at any moment im gonna put a bullet through his head and u don't wanna miss that? Youtube!" King wondered: "How many like the Mecklenburg Republicans and this college student assassin-wannabe are out there? What are they going to do on Election Day? More important, what are you going to do?" (2012, September 29). The answer for some conservatives was, to get organized. At the time of Obama's second inauguration (and Martin Luther King Jr. Day), conservatives held a Gun Appreciation Day in Washington, with Fox News analyst Andrew P. Napolitano claiming: "Here's the dirty little secret about the Second Amendment: the Second Amendment was not written in order to protect your right to shoot deer, it was written to protect your right to shoot tyrants if they take over the government. How about chewing on that one." (Blow, 2013, January 12).

Even before Obama's election, most columnists were more worried about discourse's harmful effects on the poor. After Katrina, Cynthia Tucker claimed: "Decades of right-wing claptrap have persuaded many Americans that the poor are lazy or stupid or underserving and that government programs designed to help them only hurt. That isn't so" (2005, October 16). *The Washington Post's* Colbert I. King noted that the same week NAACP chair Julian Bond claimed that racism was embedded in every aspect of American life, a survey revealed that half of all whites believed that blacks had equal

and better access to health and were as well off as whites in terms of education and jobs. King asked: "How is it that Americans — living in the same country and drawn together by communication, commerce and a common language — can see life, and each other, so differently? And, dare I ask, how can so many white Americans be so wrong?" He prescribed that America spend less time talking about race:

> Americans — of all colors — who care about fairness and justice ought to spend less time worrying about white illusions and how to dispel them, and instead devote more energy toward finding ways, large and small, locally and nationally, to improve conditions for those at the lower end of the achievement gap. After all, it's they who need the attention. That is our unfinished business.
> (2001, July 14)

Blow lamented about the lingering images of welfare abuse that conservatives still conjure deep into the 21st century, lamenting that "states are pushing ahead because the made-for-the-movies image of a crack-addicted welfare queen squandering government money on her habit is the beef carpaccio of red meat for spending-weary, hungry conservatives" (2011, February 11).

Closely tied to misrepresentation, the destructive discourse frame appeared in politics, policies, pop culture, and any event that became newsworthy. Riley, the conservative, derided the ways liberal policies and attitudes have damaged black America and people of color in general. In criticizing multiculturalism, he complained that "social conservatives who want to seal the border in response to these left-wing elites are directing their wrath at the wrong people. Keep the immigrants. Deport the Columbia faculty" (2008, May 15). He turned to history to attack the liberal rhetoric on sentencing laws:

> It's worth remembering that the harsher penalties for crack cocaine offenses that were passed in the 1980s were supported by most of the Congressional Black Caucus, including Rep. Charles Rangel of Harlem, who at the time headed the House Select Committee on Narcotics Abuse and Control. Crack was destroying black communities and many black political leaders wanted dealers to face longer sentences. Opponents of these laws want you to forget that history and buy into the false narrative of a racist criminal justice system that targets blacks.
>
> … Black ghettoes aren't dangerous because of racist cops or judges or sentencing guidelines. They're dangerous mainly due to black criminals preying on black victims. To the extent that these laws keep those criminals locked up longer, they make poor black communities safer. (2012, April 12)

To the columnists, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. remained relevant and much admired. Blow, who wrote that he worshipped King like a sports hero, proclaimed:

> King's staggering achievement is testament to what can be achieved by a man — or woman —possessed of clear conviction and rightly positioned on the side of justice and freedom. And it is a testament to the power of people united, physically gathering together so that they must be counted and considered, where they can no longer be ignored or written off. (2012, August 29).

Like other columnists, Henderson reminded readers that there was more to King's 1963 March on Washington speech, which "has been remembered most for its second half, the stirring image he painted of an equality-driven America. But few talk about the pointed and accusatory tone of the speech's first half, in which King outlined how America had left blacks holding a promissory note that had been returned for insufficient funds" (2013, June 23). Shipp, who wrote that King had changed her life, was among the columnists angered by seeing King's speech in an television ad: "Is nothing sacred anymore?" (2001, April 8).

On the other hand, the columnists annually criticized the King holiday, which they claimed had become commercialized and misappropriated by the conservative push

for colorblindness, and Black History Month. The columnists saw these celebrations as undervaluing black contribution to America while underrepresenting the struggle of black America. Shipp wrote that Black History Month is "often a simplistic display of what might be called black trivia" (2002, February 5). Banks once let Black History Month "slide by this year without writing anything about it. I am so over celebrating firsts or reprising triumphal narratives" (2013, March 3). Wickham (e.g., 2003, February 4) and Tucker were especially vocal about what Tucker considered the celebrations' disservice. She described Black History Month as "antiquated —a well-meaning relic that serves only to ghettoize black achievement" (2010), and one whose celebrations were usually "simplistic tributes to inspiring figures or paeans to well-known icons" (2011). In addition, she complained:

> Black History Month simply adds to the broad perception that the history of black Americans is not an integral part of American history. As long as the Buffalo soldiers, Ida B. Wells, Charles Drew, Dorie Miller and Ralph Bunche are relegated to pamphlets handed out in fast-food restaurants in February, most Americans will assume they are no more than footnotes to real American history. (2001, February 18).

To many columnists, the N-word retained particular destructive value. Pitts spelled out the word seven times, usually as dialogue for dramatic effect. Otherwise, the columnists saw only harm from its use. Regarding its use by comedians, Shipp wrote: "Well, this ain't funny. It's confusing to most people. It's disgusting to folks like me" (2001, March 11). After recounting its use by a freed slave with no self worth, Pitts wrote: "You will seldom read more vivid evidence of the psychological maiming to

which white people subjected black ones in this country and of the profound self-loathing that infected us as a result" (2008, October 8).

In this century, Shipp wrote two columns about the N-word and Pitts wrote eight, five about its use by blacks and four by whites (including Mark Twain). Robinson (2006, November 22), Page, and Tucker each wrote one piece about the damage the word still inflicted. Shipp, Pitts, and Tucker were careful to point out that its use was acceptable in *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* and *To Kill a Mockingbird,* but they, Robinson, and especially Pitts were disheartened by its continual use by whites and especially blacks. Pitts was alarmed to learn of a store in Malawi with the N-word as its name: "Bad enough African Americans so frequently use this emblem of self-hatred. Now we project it all the way back to the cradle of human existence" (2005, September 19).

Raising Critical Racial Consciousness (Unmasking Whiteness)

Related to damaged discourse was the columnists' attempt to root out why black America still suffered from devaluation, misrepresentation, and flawed discourse. Most of the journalists also tried to make white Americans, the usual consumers of their work, aware of themselves and their attitudes and their unacknowledged privilege. So they wrote about the meaning of race, what it was and was not, knowing the consequences of doing so. Each columnist had a headline or argued within his or her column that race mattered, and it did not matter. For instance, E. R. Shipp wrote that race does matter when it comes to affirmative action (2002, September 2) but also argued in a general column that "we make race more than it really is" (2002, May 7). Robinson (2005, May

5) and Pitts each described race as "third rail" of the America's racial conscious. To touch it, Pitts claimed, "is to be zapped by rationalizations, justifications and lies that defy reason, but that some must embrace to preserve for themselves the fiction of liberty and justice for all. Otherwise, they'd have to face the fact that advantage and disadvantage, health and sickness, wealth and poverty, life and death, are still parceled out according to melanin content of skin" (2014, March 25). Shipp called the Kobe Bryant case, in which a Latino accused the black basketball star of rape, was "yet another racial Rorschach test" (2003, September 28). Pitts was the most persistent in discussing race as its own issue, his reasoning aligning with critical race theorists:

> Though race is not a scientific reality, it is a social and cultural one. In our country, hardships and rewards, advantages and demerits are still largely apportioned according to color-line perceptions. So we are forced to evolve a vocabulary with which to discuss the subject, no matter how unwieldy, how imprecise, or how much of a PC pain in the backside.

Columnists regularly reminded readers how the Republican Party wooed conservative Southern whites and provided detailed history lessons on "race-baiting" and politics (Wickham, 2008, September 9). Long before Obama's rise, Atlanta's Cynthia Tucker often explained how the "Southern strategy" worked as its own racial project:

> To keep that support, the Republicans have believed it necessary to play the race card, whipping up fears of black crime (Willie Horton), portraying the welfare system as overwhelmingly benefitting blacks, rejecting affirmative action, downplaying the need for diversity and generally ignoring the aspirations of African-Americans. (2001, February 4)

In 2003, when Senator Rick Santorum of Pennsylvania made bigoted comments about gays, Pitts wrote that the politician's comments were "an echo of the GOP's infamous

'Southern strategy,' in which candidates used coded language to signal to the white South their antipathy toward black civil liberties":

> One is reminded of 1980, when Ronald Reagan invoked "states' rights" in the very place where three civil rights workers had been murdered 16 years before for the crime of registering black people to vote.
>
> Same strategy, different minority (2003, April 25)

During the Obama 2008 campaign, Tucker said the tactic had originally succeeded by "whipping up resentment among whites still uncomfortable with the changes wrought by the civil rights movement" (2008, May 18):

> The late Lee Atwater, the GOP political consultant who polished the Southern strategy to a vicious sheen, apologized on his deathbed for the Willie Horton ads -- the ones that linked a black rapist with Democratic nominee Michael Dukakis.
>
> Atwater's 11th-hour repentance didn't deter his successors. Republican political strategists kept waving the race card for the most mundane of reasons: It worked. (2008, May 18)

After Obama's election, Pitts conjured up the political tactic to warn readers that the tactic would return:

> Ever since Richard Nixon's infamous "Southern strategy" of 1968, Republicans have won power largely by convincing voters that strange and exotic others were to blame for all their ills. It's the feminists' fault, they said. Or the blacks. Or the Hispanics, the Muslims or the gays. (2008, November 19)

Pitts was right. During the 2012 Republican primaries, Charles M. Blow wrote that candidates were still playing racial politics:

> Playing to racial anxiety and fear isn't a fluke; it's a strategy that energizes the Republican base.
>
> Kevin Phillips, who popularized the right's "Southern Strategy," was quoted in The New York Times Magazine in May 1970 as saying that "the more Negroes who register as Democrats in the South, the sooner the Negrophobe whites will quit the Democrats and become Republicans." (2012, January 7)

In addition, white voters were no longer just voters (e.g., Page, 2008, May 11). And the columnists put many on the defensive for their assessment of Obama. During the 2008 campaign, Blow countered the argument that blacks were voting overwhelmingly for Obama because of their shared race:

> Some might say that turnabout is fair play, citing the fact that 89 percent of blacks say they plan to vote for Obama. That level of support represents a racial advantage for him, too, right? Not necessarily. Blacks overwhelmingly vote Democratic in the general election anyway. According to CNN exit polls John Kerry got 88 percent of the black vote in 2004.
>
> Think racism isn't a major factor in this election? Think again. (August 9, 2008)

Henderson reached out to one white voter who did not support the candidate solely because he was black:

> I thank her for welcoming me and for her honesty. That said, I find her bigotry is more complicated and nuanced — but no less ignorant — than the overt, cross-burning racism that gets portrayed as prototypical. (2008, June 8)

In one column, Shipp, knowingly or not, adhered to Omi and Winant's (2014) idea that any group can produce racism. She quoted a former worker at a hospital with changing racial dynamics: "Racism is about power. So if your group is in power holding back another group, and you're holding them back because of their race, that's racism":

> A whole lot of black folks should plead guilty. But won't.
>
> "What appalls me is the premature wishful thinking that posits the notion of colorblindness, or that we've somehow overcome our early history of race," says author John Edgar Wideman. "It's not only a lie, it's 'a willed ignorance,' as James Baldwin said." (2003, September 21)

In most instances, the hijacking of the word "racist" and "racism" by blacks and whites frustrated most of these columnists, who all wrote pieces chastising both groups. But the columnists insisted on writing about race and racism while acknowledging that

meaningful dialogue might be fruitless. Robinson wrote that the words "racism" and "racist" had become "conversation stoppers" (2014, May 26). As Charles M. Blow put it:

> Americans are engaged in a war over a word: racism.
>
> Mature commentary on the subject has descended into tribal tirades, hypersensitive defenses and rapid-fire finger-pointing. The very definition of the word seems under assault, being bent and twisted back on itself and stretched and pulled beyond recognition.
>
> Many on the left have taken an absolutist stance, that the anti-Obama sentiment reeks of racism and denial only served to confirm guilt. Many on the right feel as though they have been convicted without proof — that tossing "racism" their way is itself racist.
>
> The "racists crying racism" meme is being pushed hard, on multiple fronts, all centered around the president. (2010, July 13)

Blow, relying on the narrative, called on Obama to directly enter the rhetorical battle: "It's your choice, Mr. President. I say stand up — for America, for common humanity, for civil discourse. To paraphrase the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., they can't ride your back unless its bent" (2010, July 13). Page half-jokingly wondered if "racism" had become the R-word, replacing the N-word. They scolded black leaders for using it recklessly, as Tucker did here:

> The racism charge is divisive, destructive and overused. Black activists, politicians and regular folks with a grudge cry "racism" all too often, shutting down civil discussion and, worse, de-valuing the word. As a result, actual acts of racism are less likely to attract the attention they deserve. (2008, October 15)

As previously noted, they derided cable television's obsession with missing white women in the past decade, with Robinson writing three columns in three months (2005, August 12, June 28, and June 10; Tucker, 2005; King, 2001). During Katrina, the columnists pointed out that whites looted and begged for government help after earthquakes and

wildfires. Pitts wanted to know why mass shooters in surburbia were not described as pathological white shooters (2001, March 10). But this frame was more than a tit-for-tat reaction. They wrote of white privilege as a fact of white life, though whites did not acknowledge or understand its power. When a reader criticized Pitts for naming his daughter Onjel, the columnist wrote:

> What always stuns me is the implicit and conceited assumption that white people represent the "norm" to which the black people ought to aspire, even at the cost of abandoning their own cultural prerogatives. Name that black child Malik, some people say, and you shut him out of the "American mainstream." And I wonder: Would they criticize a Hispanic for naming his child Jose or an Asian for naming hers Ming? For that matter, can you imagine me lecturing the parents of some blond child who named their daughter Sarah instead of Tameka? (2001, March 24).

The more serious matter of the Trayvon Martin shooting spurred Pitts to explain to his readers why Hispanic George Zimmerman, his killer, was white and benefited from white privilege:

> White, then, is not simply color, but privilege — not necessarily in the sense of wealth, but rather in the sense of having one's personhood and individuality respected, a privilege so basic I doubt it registers with many whites as privilege at all. We're talking about the privilege of being seen, of having your worth presumed, of receiving the benefit of the doubt and some human compassion, of being treated as if you matter. (2012, March 25)

Most of the columnists sought to destroy the myth of colorblindness as a virtue, especially during the 2008 campaign: After readers claimed they ignored race, Tucker replied that she was not "buying it":

> While I am sympathetic to any desire to get past dated and useless habits of mind — especially the contentious politics of the color line – that's just nonsense. Not one of us, black, white or brown, is colorblind.

> That's not a condemnation, not a presumption of malicious bigotry. It's just an acknowledgment of the peculiar burdens of humanity, especially in these United States. Assumptions about race and ethnicity are so deeply embedded in our culture that we can hardly help noticing skin color. (2008, January 20)

In 2008, Banks attended a rally in which a mostly white, young crowd "applauded as the small corps of self-described 'anti-racist whites' introduced them to their hidden racist ways. The peasant skirts, political T-shirts and revolutionary cries made me feel like I'd wandered back in time, into a radical chic salon. But I clapped too, because it was nice to hear white people talk publicly, bluntly, about race. And not pretend to be colorblind" (2008, November 16). Tucker and other columnists returned to the theme of colorblindness after Katrina exposed New Orleans' race/class division. Robinson noted that Mayor Ray Nagin's re-election after the devastation was proof that "[n]ot even a hurricane as powerful as Katrina can blow away hundreds of years of history – or somehow make an easygoing but troubled city suddenly go colorblind" (2006, May 23).

The columnists occasionally wrote a follow-up column after reader reaction to an earlier piece on race (e.g., Banks, 2013, March 16; 2008, November 6, 2012; 2008, April 1; 2008, January 29). They addressed readers who told them they should only write about black issues, as King did here: "I read my mail. There are, indeed some people who believe that African American journalists should stick with African American subjects and that the only victims of neglect and injustice worth writing about are people of color. My reply: To hell with that" (2006, June 3). Pitts wrote about one column that garnered a lot of attention: "Now, let me sum up for you the thousand-plus (Did he say thousand-plus? Yes, he did.) e-mails, snail mails and letters to editors that took issue … As my

sainted mother would say, Lord have mercy. Lord, give me strength" (2001, July 11). They addressed readers who told them to quit writing about race (e.g., Banks, 2008, March 25). Tucker noted that if Obama were to be elected, "he'd become the first black president in this nation's history, a mere half-century after black Americans were beaten and bombed and fire-hosed for trying to secure the franchise or sit in the front of the bus." But she reminded her readers (and made a pre-emptive strike before they reacted) that "it would be foolish to pretend that racial considerations have disappeared from American public life":

> I know, I know. Some of you are furious that I've brought this up. I'll be inundated with e-mails and letters from some of you denouncing me for "playing the race card." You'll insist race and its implications are all I ever discuss. Not true, not even close. (I know, because I've counted.) Some of you will claim that racism remains alive and well because I and my fellow race-card-playing pundits won't let it go.
>
> Somehow, I doubt it's as simple as that. Many psychologists believe that recognition of "the other" — those with obvious differences in skin color or hair texture or language — is deeply embedded in human beings, a primal instinct. Most of us take race and gender and other superficial distinctions into account subconsciously, without being aware of it. That doesn't make us racist. It merely makes us human. (2008, August 6)

Charles M. Blow reminded white extremists that they are a vocal minority in many ways: "You may want 'your country back,' but you can't have it. That sound you hear is the relentless, irrepressible march of change. Welcome to America: The Remix" (2010, March 27).

Black Responsibility and Black Pride

The fifth frame, as noted in Table 2, includes celebrating racial achievements (especially the election and re-election of President Obama, previously discussed);

tackling black-on-black crime; and promoting black self-reliance as preached by comedian Bill Cosby to uplift the black underclass, a centuries-old practice of the black leadership.[12] The comedian used a 2004 NAACP event to disparage underclass values, and wound up engaged in a rhetorical war with some African American intellectuals, notably scholar Michael Eric Dyson. But the columnists mostly supported Cosby's message; like Riley, they also relied on the destructive racial discourse frame to criticize Cosby's critics. Tucker wrote:

> But isn't it about time that black Americans acknowledge that, at the dawn of the 21st century, personal responsibility has at least as much to do with success in America as race? Isn't it only fair to note that the landmark Supreme Court ruling of 50 years ago did roll back much of systemic racism? After all, if you believe that racism continues to largely limit black success, that will certainly prove itself true. (2004, May 26)

Page, who mentioned Cosby 13 times from 2000 to 2013, was the comedian's most ardent supporter as the two shared a perspective on self-reliance:

> Cosby's view, by contrast, offers a side of black life that's seldom seen on the news, a self-reliance liberalism. Right-wing ideologues pretend that self-reliance liberalism does not exist. But most successful African Americans are intimately familiar with it. The message, as Cosby might say, is simple: Those of us who have made it need to help those who have not, but poor black folks need to "hold up their end in this deal," too. (2004, May 26)

Every columnist, including Riley, referred to Cosby when speaking of black responsibility and often referred to black conservatism, which mainstream media rarely

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[12] In December 2014, after the time frame of this study's methodology, widespread accusations against Bill Cosby for sexual assault were in the news. In late 2014 columns, Eugene Robinson and Leonard Pitts Jr. expressed dismay about the accusations. For a comprehensive discussion of racial uplift, refer to Kevin Kelly Gaines' *Uplifting the Race: Black Leadership, Politics, and Culture in the Twentieth Century* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996).

acknowledged (again, myth of the black monolith). Tucker pointed out that according to one survey, 53% of black Americans said that "blacks who don't get ahead are mainly responsible for their situation, while just 30 percent said discrimination is mainly to blame. They're quiet about it, but many black Americans agree with Bill Cosby and his message of black self-help" (2008, June 8). Colbert I. King even used the comedian's name as a noun, noting that some African Americans thought that Obama the candidate had "pulled a Bill Cosby" is talking about black responsibility (2008, July 12). Tucker pointed out that during his 2008 campaign: "Obama's tough love — like Bill Cosby's — is generally well-received by black audiences. Many black Americans have observed the decline of the family with alarm, just as many other Americans have" (2008, July 13). In fact, Tucker and Pitts hoped that the Obama family would serve as a role model for responsible black parenting.

Although not to the same extent as Cosby, writer and journalist Tavis Smiley also was praised for practical guides to black self-reliance (e.g., Pitts, 2006, May 6; Shipp, 2004, June 20). Page returned to his familiar theme of improving the country by improving the conditions of the have-nots: "Tavis does have gifts, especially the gift of gab. If his gifts can help us to shake loose from outdated and ineffective models of leadership, more power to him. After all, 'when you make black America better,' as he likes to say, 'you make America better' " (2007, February 21).

The institution of marriage was seen as critical to stop the growing black underclass. Pitts commented:

> [T]he point here is that African America's reluctance to embrace marriage is symptomatic of a larger dislocation in the black family. That dislocation is seen in the aforementioned crisis of incarceration — one in three young black men in prison, on parole or on probation. Seen in the almost 60 percent of black single mothers left to subsist on under $25,000 a year. Seen in the fact that the majority of African-American children are born out of wedlock and raised separately from their fathers. (2003, May 19).

The Post's Colbert I. King (2012) tied the crisis for black children to a lack of fathers. He used a juvenile youth center at Christmas to tell (presumed black) readers: "…not having a responsible father around to help a child deal with life's challenges has consequences for families and the community. That's especially true with boys. Learning how to become a man is hard when there's no man around to learn from."

In 2005, on the tenth anniversary of the Million Man March, King wondered: "Has respect for marriage been restored? Are more of our boys being raised into men who behave responsibly toward their families? Are we making the investments in family life that we pledged? Are more fathers staying with mothers? Are more of us accepting responsibility to be good husbands and fathers and builders of our community?"

> The answers vary from neighborhood to neighborhood and from city to city. This much is true: Those solemn pledges haven't been fulfilled in the nation's capital.

His conclusion is a not-so-subtle swipe at standard black leadership:

> Reuniting families, raising children, rebuilding communities — these require strong individuals with pride in their heritage and respect for themselves. It can't be achieved from a podium at a rally. It starts at home with family values that are reinforced in our churches and neighborhoods. (2005, October 15)

Banks, who raised three daughters alone after her husband died, saw the term "single mother" as too broad a representation that damned women like herself:

> Single mother, I realized, was not just a descriptor, but a license for strangers to criticize my children, my prospects, my morals.
>
> … But that big picture is layered in ways that make generalizing faulty: The middle-class divorcee with good child care and a steady job has different prospects than the teenage dropout raising children on welfare in the projects.
>
> … There are worse things than not having a father. What puts children at risk is not their single mother, but the instability — financial and emotional — that often comes with being un-partnered. (2012, December 1)

Another related element within this frame is nostalgia for the strong black institutions that thrived during segregation. Henderson, in commenting on the fate of one razed public housing project, remembered when public housing was not shorthand for urban blight:

> It was the first housing project for African Americans back in the 1930s, and provided a ladder up for thousands of Detroit families. As most speakers pointed out as the last vestige of the project began to fall Monday, it wasn't just famous Detroiters like Smokey Robinson or the Supremes who got their start there; much of the city's black middle class could at one time trace its roots to Brewster-Douglass.
>
> But in its later years, it also became, as most projects of its ilk did, a symbol of the cycle of poverty and the kind of economic despair that spans generations. (2014, March 11).

They took pride in strong black schools and caring teachers, especially in segregated but close-knit communities. Banks wrote that her once-strong segregated school, suffered scholastically after integration for a variety of reasons (2011, January 12). Although most columnists praised the continuing contribution of historically black colleges, Tucker and Riley saw their necessity waning, especially as their academic standards seemed to be deteriorating. As Riley wrote:

> At one time black colleges were an essential response to racism. They trained a generation of civil rights lawyers and activists who helped end segregation. Their

> place in U.S. history is secure. Today, however, dwindling enrollments and endowments indicate that fewer and fewer blacks believe that these schools, as currently constituted, represent the best available academic choice.
>
> A black president is uniquely qualified to restart this discussion. Anyone who cares about the future of black higher education should hope that he does. (2010, September 28)

They praised the historic firsts of Condoleezza Rice and Colin Powell in the Bush Administration, but all 11 columnists were all harsh on so-called black leadership, considering it obsolete or worse, race-baiters. As Robinson remarked: "The passing of Coretta Scott King, the formidable 'first lady' of the civil rights movement, makes it impossible to ignore a difficult fact: The era in which the phrase 'black leadership' had real meaning is long gone" (2006, February 1). They saw such classic Civil Rights organizations as the NAACP and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference as outdated (e.g., Shipp, 2004, November 21). They routinely dismissed Louis Farrakhan, the Nation of Islam leader. Shipp summed it up in one column: "It just wouldn't be a Louis Farrakhan-convened gathering without huge helpings of nonsense and conspiracy theories — and fund-raising, of course — that in fact mock the legitimate efforts of black people to improve their lot in the United States" (2005, October 23). Tucker was especially harsh on local politicians she saw using race to retain their power. Tucker described one Atlanta mayor as **"**worse than any racist":

> A master demagogue, Mayor Bill Campbell is always ready with a fiery denunciation of his critics — especially those who oppose his stewardship of the city's minority business program. White critics are racists. Black critics are Uncle Toms or Aunt Jemimas or "handkerchief head Negroes" who ought to be "shunned." (2001, December 19)

The Rev. Jesse Jackson's admission that he had fathered a child out of wedlock,

as well as his accidentally threatening to castrate Obama during 2008, served to lessen his stature in the eyes of columnists (e.g., King, 2008, July 12). But Page pointed out to his white readership why the voiceless blacks still turn to certain leaders:

> I am often asked why so many black Americans still support the Rev. Jesse Jackson or the Rev. Al Sharpton, even though their tactics seem mostly to be stuck in the 1960s. I find my answer in wire stories like this recent dispatch from New York City: "The morning 23-year-old Sean Bell was shot to death by police, his grieving relatives did something that has become almost routine in such cases: They called the Rev. Al Sharpton. Within hours, the longtime civil-rights activist had consoled relatives, held two news conferences, and begun organizing a community rally for the next day."
>
> Now, just ask yourself: If police shot your son to death before his wedding and wounded two friends after firing 50 shots into their car and there was no gun found in their car, whom would you call?

Although her patience with him fluctuated, Shipp once acknowledged that Sharpton would "probably have to do until something better comes along" (2001, March 27).

The columnists also noted the problems of the underclass, with Shipp worried about black man's disease, whose symptoms included "hanging out, drinking, drugging — and being taken to task by cops for living while black (2004, September 12). Shipp also asserted that a certain segment of black men needed to act responsibly around the police: "The guys who like to hang out in the streets — especially in crime-ridden areas — need to learn to control their tongues and their tempers and not flee when they see an officer approach" (2001, July 15). A Tucker headline summed up how some columnists felt: "Idle black man, tragically, aren't just a stereotype" (2006, April 16). Pitts criticized a generation's "historical amnesia, blind indifference and a worship of filthy lucre" (2006, September 18).

As referred to earlier, Riley often mentioned black-on-black crime, as did other columnists, who all saw it as a community issue that went beyond policing. Page also took a swipe at black leadership as he stressed what the community had to do about black-on-black crime:

> Many civil-rights leaders are observing Martin Luther King Jr. Day this year with rallies to lambaste hate crimes and other terrible things that white people have done to black people. I propose that we African-Americans also take a little time to talk about something else: the things we do to ourselves.
>
> It is still true, for example, that despite our well-placed concern about "hate crimes," a black person is far more likely to be murdered by another black than by anyone else. (2001, January 14)

Akin the frame of the devaluation of black life, Wickham, Henderson, and King were dogged in seeing a disparity in how such crimes were treated by the police, the media and black leadership. Wickham used the high-profile shootings of Sean Bell in 2007 and Trayvon Martin in 2012 to compare them with the inattention to black-on-black crimes, noting "Bell's death drew the scorn of civil rights leaders and black activists, many of whom took part in the march," while one victim of a black-on-black crime "generated no such attention":

> And that makes me mad as hell.
>
> As troubling as it is that Bell's life might have been cut short by the unlawful actions of some rogue cops, it bothers me more that most of this nation's black murder victims are killed by other blacks.
>
> Of the country's 14,860 homicide victims in 2005, 7,125 were black, according to the FBI's Uniform Crime Report. And of the 3,289 cases that year in which a single black was killed by a single assailant, the FBI says, 91% of the killers were black.
>
> Let me put this another way: The number of blacks killed in 2005 in this one homicide category alone approaches the total of all the blacks lynched in this country from 1882 to 1968, according to records maintained by Tuskegee University. (2007, January 2)

After Trayvon's killing, Wickham compared the black-on-black murders to the war dead in Afghanistan (2012, April 10). In fact, the two columns had the same headline: "Black-on-black crime: Where's the outrage?" (2012, April 10; 2007, January 2). Henderson also wondered why compared with Trayvon, Detroit's black victims were less worthy of attention:

> I get it. I'm angry, too. And scared for kids like my son, who'll be a teenager soon enough — and seen as a threat by some people.
>
> But I'm also wondering: What have we done for Delric? Or Kade'jah? Or Je'Rean?
>
> They were black kids, too. They were innocent. And they were killed for stupid, stupid reasons right here in Detroit.
>
> Is it because their killings had nothing to do with racism that their deaths didn't evoke such passion or spark nationwide social media campaigns?
>
> Does combatting racial stereotypes —which is about fighting one of the black community's external foes — command an easier mental and emotional response than confronting the demons that exist between and among African Americans?
> (2012, March 25)

Tucker, Pitts, Page, and Wickham blamed rap culture for harming the black community by promoting misogyny and thug culture. Tucker showed how the spectrum of the black responsibility frame by blaming one rapper's murder for the curious and perverted appeal of rap culture while also taking a swipe at black leadership:

> But there have been no sharp denunciations of the violence from the black institutions that matter, no groundswell of anger or disgust on black college campuses, no marches or demonstrations led by self-appointed black leaders.
>
> Had just one of these young men been killed by white police officers, the machinery of black protest would have revved into high gear, with press conferences, marches and demands for justice. The relatively muted response to the string of dead rappers — the suspected perpetrators are mostly other young black men — suggests that a dead black man matters most when his murder can be used as political propaganda.

Pitts blamed rap for creating a "thug" misrepresentation of Jordan Davis, the unarmed black teen who was shot dead by a white driver (2014, February 11). After it was disclosed that one rapper had embellished his criminal record to improve his street credibility, Tucker also complained:

> If black men … enthusiastically abandon a passable reputation for the notoriety of a prison record, then black America is in serious trouble. If it is better to be an outlaw than to be a teacher or a chemist or an accountant, then young black men will continue to go to prison in record numbers. If it is more acceptable to be violent and reckless than to be a responsible father and husband, then marriage will continue to decline in black communities. (2008, May 4)

The elements of the black responsibility frame can be found in this passage Henderson wrote as Detroit filed for bankruptcy. He was again nostalgic for a stable past – that of his family's and where he grew up – that seemed so unlikely for those living there today:

> We weren't the typical family in the King Homes, as we called the project when I was a kid. My mother's meager income qualified us for subsidized housing, but she also made enough to send my sister and me to private schools; she knew education was the way forward for us, so she scrimped on housing.
>
> It was no garden spot back in the 1970s and early '80s, when Detroit was often the world's murder capital and always in the national news for its crime rate. But we lived there without ever being crime victims. And when we moved out after my mom got a higher-paying job, my sister and I missed the place. Our family found opportunity, and a path forward, from there.
>
> Now, it is a place so ravaged by crime that a multi-agency task force is sweeping it for offenders. For months, reports have talked about the prevalence of drug dealing and violence, and of how scared residents are there.
>
> That's not progress, nor is it any way to live. This city won't bounce back until places like the King Homes are safe for less fortunate families, and given the frequency of these raids around town, it's clear we have a long way to go before that's true. (2013, December 4)

Reverence for the Constitution and American Ideals

The sixth frame in Table 2 is the reverence for the Constitution and the ideals it has set for all Americans. Although columnists note the incongruous act of slavery among our freedom-loving founding fathers, Pitts commented: "Can ideals save this country? Actually, ideals are the only things that ever have" (2007, July 18). A common thread across these frames is the importance of history as knowledge, a history that they have lived, most in the last vestiges of the segregated South and national racism. Tucker provided a prevalent perspective of the columnists, declaring:

> The First Amendment gives me the right to speak my mind, to criticize the Pentagon, to annoy my critics. That constitutional freedom has been guaranteed by the bravery of millions of Americans, untold numbers of them black, some of them from my own family.

In a column tying the Gettysburg Address with the shooting of an unarmed black woman, Henderson wrote in a 2013 *Free Press* column:

> Because this is America, we keep trying, keep moving forward. Milestones get reached, barriers fall, and the equality of personal understanding, outreach and compassion remains the greatest weapon against intolerance and ignorance. We're doing the work. Will it ever be finished? It wasn't in Lincoln's lifetime, and it probably won't be in mine. But when I look at how far we've come, how much we've changed, I think Lincoln himself would be awfully proud.

Unlike their attitude toward democracy, there was less explicit enthusiasm for capitalism. Columnists rarely discussed its merits, but Robinson (2008, April 4) and Henderson (20014, February 12) alluded to the missing rungs of the ladder in terms of economic mobility for the poorest Americans, especially those who are black. Near the anniversary of Katrina's devastation of New Orleans, and especially of its poor blacks,

Page remarked: “Capitalism obviously works. Our American challenge is to make it work for every American” (2006, August 20). Henderson, a former Supreme Court reporter, respected the Second Amendment, the right to bear arms, even though he said he would not do so.

They embraced the First Amendment, as journalists would be expected to do (e.g., Shipp, 2005, June 12). As Tucker did, they tied it to their love of country: “Perhaps mine is a peculiar view, but I believe patriotism encourages citizens to criticize their country when they believe it has gone astray, when it betrays its principles by using torture against suspected enemies or when it eavesdrops on its citizens without a warrant.” After listing instances of oppression overseas, she concluded: “I want to live in an America that strives to live up to its ideals, that continues its journey toward a ‘more perfect union.’ And if good patriots don't point out its shortcomings, who will?” (2008, July 6)

The columnists reminded readers how this country has historically treated black Americans, who in turn responded with patriotism and a belief in American ideals. Writing a column about a black general who died on July 4, Page wrote in 2002: “He could hardly have left us on a more appropriate date. Davis called it a ‘privilege’ to be an American, even when some Americans did not feel privileged to have him” (2002, July 11). Wickham used the movie “Red Tails,” on the World War II black air corps known as the Tuskegee Airmen, to counter Newt Gingrich’s vision of perfect (white) America:

> As movies go, Red Tails … is an enthralling look at a history many Americans would rather forget. But we can’t and shouldn’t. The thing that is truly exceptional about America is not its democratic idealism, but the willingness of those who have been denied its promise to still believe in the vision of the “more

> perfect union" enshrined in the Constitution's preamble, if not in the actual text.
>
> What is truly exceptional about this country is that just two generations after many questioned the ability of blacks to come to the nation's defense, Americans elected a black man to lead them. (2012, January 24)

Tucker was among the columnists bothered that Obama's patriotism was questioned during the 2008 campaign and used their family histories to counter such thoughts. In a column in which she spells out the N-word to show how her father was treated after serving in the war, she wrote: "I never saw my father wear a flag pin, but he was a patriot. He was more faithful to the United States of America than I would have been if my life had been as burdened by legally sanctioned racism. Yet my father rarely showed anger or frustration over the social and institutional bigotry that could easily have cast a pall over his life" (2008, April 20). Robinson, who described his father and father-in-law's service in World War II, sharply wrote: "I have no patience with anyone who thinks that patriots don't have brown skin":

> The fact that African American patriotism is never simple doesn't mean that it's in any way half-hearted; to the contrary, complicated relationships tend to be deepest and the strongest. (2008, July 4)

According to Banks, Tucker, Page, Henderson, Robinson, and Pitts, Obama's election fulfilled Constitution ideals. Pitts noted that his election had made the phrase "We the people" relevant and inclusive (2008, November 5). On the occasion of Obama's second inauguration, Robinson was historical and personal:

> For my two sons, this is history — unfinished history, to be sure, but distant enough that they learned it from books. Their children, in turn, will grow up in a world in which one of the central tenets of American exceptionalism — that anyone can be president — is demonstrably true. Or, at least, not demonstrably false. (2013, January 22)

Together, these frames were used to argue that race mattered but not in same ways that mainstream American discourse has shaped it.

RACE AND THE PULITZER FOR COMMENTARY

The purpose of RQ2c — What role does race play in the Pulitzer Prize-winning entries of the columnists? — was to examine the significance and prominence of race in works that the industry considered worthy of its highest prize. For this analysis, the Pulitzer entries of all eight black columnists who have won in commentary were included: Stephen Henderson of *The Detroit Free Press* (2014); Eugene Robinson of *The Washington Post* (2009); Cynthia Tucker of *The Atlanta Journal Constitution* (2007); Leonard Pitts Jr. of *The Miami Herald* (2004); Colbert I. King of *The Washington Post* (2003), E.R. Shipp of *The New York Daily News* (1996), the late William Raspberry of *The Washington Post* (1994), and Clarence Page of *The Chicago Tribune* (1989), the first black columnist to win the Pulitzer for commentary.

The Pulitzer is seen as the highest recognition within print news media, and a gauge of the industry's interest in a topic. If that is the case, the industry prizes the black columnists' discussion on race because the entries focused on black America and its attendant issues (see Table 3). Nine of the ten Pulitzer columns that Robinson, Tucker, Shipp, Raspberry (who died in 2012), and Page wrote explicitly centered on race; their remaining columns mentioned an aspect of race or someone associated with race, like Jeremiah Wright. Henderson, the most recent Pulitzer winner, had the fewest columns

Table 3. Pulitzer Prize-Winning Entries of Black Columnists
Eight black columnists have won the Pulitzer for commentary; each entry except for Raspberry's consisted of 10 columns. "Citation" is Pulitzer jury's description for each entry. "Racial focus" refers to number of columns centered on race.

Columnist, Year Won	Pulitzer Citation	Racial Focus	Major Themes/ Frames of Citations
Stephen Henderson, Detroit Free Press, 2014	"For his columns on the financial crisis facing his hometown, written with passion and a stirring sense of place, sparing no one in their critique"	2 of 10	Toxic and failed political leadership; Detroit survival
Eugene Robinson, Washington Post, 2008	"For his eloquent columns on the 2008 presidential campaign that focus on the election of the first African-American president, showcasing graceful writing and grasp of the larger historic picture"	9 of 10	Importance of black American history; Politics, Myth of black monolith
Cynthia Tucker, Atlanta Journal Constitution, 2007	"For her courageous, clear-headed columns that evince a strong sense of morality and persuasive knowledge of the community"	9 of 10	Voter suppression; Failed black leadership
Leonard Pitts Jr., Miami Herald, 2004	"For his fresh, vibrant columns that spoke, with both passion and compassion, to ordinary people on often divisive issues"	4 of 10 (4 others allude to race)	Race; Damaged discourse; Co-opted religion
Colbert I. King, Washington Post, 2003	"For his against-the-grain columns that speak to people in power with ferocity and wisdom"	4 of 10 (5 others allude to race)	Four columns on black crime victims; City dysfunction
E.R. Shipp, NY Daily News, 1996	"For her penetrating columns on race, welfare and other social issues"	9 of 10	Black responsibility and leadership
William Raspberry, Washington Post, 1994	"For his compelling commentaries on a variety of social and political topics"	7 of 8	Black violence; black responsibility
Clarence Page, Chicago Tribune, 1989	"For his provocative columns on local and national affairs"	8 of 10	Black responsibility; representation

that centered on race, but their magnitude should not be discounted: one explained why

Detroit's problems could not be blamed on black leaders, but weak leadership that could be traced back decades long before African Americans gained political clout (2013, September 15). The second column examined the changing racial dynamics of a city in crisis, with traditional black leadership tactics seemingly out of date (2013, October 27).

What is critical is that race is often implied — if nothing else, through the readers' assumptions — and make no explicit mention of race. Reflecting his diligence on unsolved crime and dysfunctional police systems, King had three entries about crime victims whose race he never mentioned. In the column headlined "He Should Have Been in Jail" on June 29, 2002, the names and King's phrasings suggest black America:

> The name Mikea Rahul Washington may not ring a bell. Maybe it's because Mikea wasn't with us very long. … You see, 'round about this time two weeks ago in a rowhouse in Northwest Washington, a knife-wielding assailant nearly took Mikea's head off.
>
> Mikea did absolutely nothing to bring on his own murder. He couldn't stop it, either. For goodness sake, Mikea was only 18 months old.
>
> He didn't die alone. Simona Druyard, an 80-year-old woman who owned the house in the 1400 block of Spring Road NW, also went to glory with him, as a result of her throat being slashed by the same person. (2002, June 29).

The column contained King's usual disgust at Washington's divide:

> What next? If experience with the District's civic leadership is any guide, absolutely nothing. No one is going to raise a stink. The politicians are preoccupied with photo-ops, their own reelections and bringing the Olympics to Washington. Criminal justice system actors are waiting for payday to roll around.
>
> And before the week is out, there's a good bet some friend of the court will find a way to remind me in the most condescending tones, that I am unschooled in the law, the majesty of judicial decision-making and the way the system works — and that I should mind my own business.

After all, little Mikea and old Ms. Druyard —nobodies to downtown Washington's powers-that-be — are now history. (2002, June 29)Among Page's entries is a column comparing violence in a "peaceful" suburban school and the inner-city. Page disagreed when a friend had remarked "the shock was worse" for the suburbanites "because at least the people who live in crime-ridden urban neighborhoods 'are more used to it' ":

> Maybe. But as one who has spent quite a bit of time in high-crime neighborhoods and has known quite a few of their residents, I have yet to meet any I would say was "used to it." I don't think anyone ever gets "used to it."
>
> … Children in Henry Horner Homes know stray bullets sometimes can smash through apartment windows. They learn early to do the low crawl home to avoid gunfire. One murdered boy was left sitting up in an elevator as a warning to others. (1988, May 25)

As King and Raspberry also did in their winning entries, Page saw white society, including the media, preferring to look away from urban violence:

> The governor has not called for a crackdown on anything in Henry Horner. Neither has the mayor or any of the presidential candidates. Henry Horner residents may not have grown completely "used to" their violence, but it looks as if most of the rest of us have. I do not wish to diminish Winnetka's tragedy. But in sharing the pain of those made victims by a tragedy that is not likely to happen in Winnetka again soon, is it not an appropriate time to consider those for whom senseless violence is a far more frequent occurrence? (1988, May 25)

The analysis found the entries are mostly representative of the columnists' work in that particular year. There are three interesting exceptions. Race is a central theme in five of Pitts' columns, but his message in three leans toward black responsibility, as their headlines indicate: "Affirmative action needs a deadline" (June 27); "Hard-core rap is cashing in on stereotypes" (October 27) and in the case of an overweight man who died

after being subdued by police officers, "Cincinnati case not a tough call: Man killed self" (December 8). The two other racial columns are on Emmett Till, after the death of the teenager's mother (January 10) and on white privilege (October 20). Religion and conservative religious hypocrisy are central to four columns.

Eight of Shipp's columns critiqued policies seen to favor African Americans or were critical of black leadership, a higher ratio than her general body of her columns. She pointed out that while she had never been part of an affirmative action program, she thought it was "flawed but needed." Even though she once lived in public housing, welfare is needed but the poor "need help beyond welfare" (1995, March 15).

Shipp and Tucker were especially critical of black leadership and newsmakers in their entries. Shipp found fault with Farrakhan (May 17), lawyer Johnnie Cochran (August 23), and Harlem leaders (December 13). Tucker wrote columns criticizing four black leaders and politicians, including the civil rights icon Andrew Young (2006, August 27).

Robinson's Pulitzer entry in 2008 followed the Obama campaign and included a column on the growing class divide headlined: "Two Black Americas," written on the 40th anniversary of the King's assassination (2008, April 4). The final entry was a post-election column on November 8, in which he described what Obama's election personally meant to him. It is cited extensively because it summed up the narrative of black America, how it is historical yet shaped by the here and now. The column relied on frames, and in its ironic ending, nodded to whiteness of what seemed to be a bygone era:

> When President Bush spoke about the election yesterday, he mentioned the important message that Americans will send to the world, and to themselves, when the Obama family moves into the White House.
>
> For African Americans, though, this is personal.
>
> I can't help but experience Obama's election as a gesture of recognition and acceptance —which is patently absurd, if you think about it. The labor of black people made this great nation possible. Black people planted and tended the tobacco, indigo and cotton on which America's first great fortunes were built. Black people fought and died in every one of the nation's wars. Black people fought and died to secure our fundamental rights under the Constitution. We don't have to ask for anything from anybody.
>
> Yet something changed on Tuesday when Americans — white, black, Latino, Asian — entrusted a black man with the power and responsibility of the presidency. I always meant it when I said the Pledge of Allegiance in school. I always meant it when I sang the national anthem at ball games and shot off fireworks on the Fourth of July. But now there's more meaning in my expressions of patriotism, because there's more meaning in the stirring ideals that the pledge and the anthem and the fireworks represent.
>
> It's not that I would have felt less love of country if voters had chosen John McCain. And this reaction I'm trying to describe isn't really about Obama's policies. I'll disagree with some of his decisions, I'll consider some of his public statements mere double talk and I'll criticize his questionable appointments. My job will be to hold him accountable, just like any president, and I intend to do my job.
>
> For me, the emotion of this moment has less to do with Obama than with the nation. Now I know how some people must have felt when they heard Ronald Reagan say "it's morning again in America." The new sunshine feels warm on my face. (2008, November 6)

The Pulitzer-winning entries relied heavily on racial themes, which also used the frames seen throughout the columnists' work. Biography was summoned to lend credence to their argument, which the Pulitzer committee undoubtedly found convincing.

Chapter 7: Commentary on Katrina, Gates, and Trayvon

The previous chapter showed most findings grouped by category, most notably the reliance on the black narrative, the important role of biography and the use of six frames. Examining three events as they were covered chronologically – New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina (2005), the arrest of Harvard scholar Henry Louis Gates (2009), and the killing of Trayvon Martin, an unarmed black teenager (2012) – further illustrates how black columnists relied on an African American narrative and employed frames to provide context of the black American experience.

KATRINA AND RACE

Images from New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina "put the perennial issues of race and poverty back on the front page of America's attention, at least for a little while" (Page, 2005, September 7). The columnists' coverage of Hurricane Katrina from late August 2005 through the first anniversary of the devastation is indicative of how they employed the frames, how they saw Katrina as part of the black narrative in which all African Americans know that many of their people never achieved the economic mobility that integration seemed to promise. The seven journalists with columns at the time (all but Banks, Blow, Henderson, and Riley) relied on frames of misrepresentation (the equation of poverty with criminality, poverty with ineptitude, and the myth of the black monolith) and the devaluation of black life in an attempt to give a more dimensional meaning to the heavily racialized scenes and to place the blame on the Bush administration's handling of the disaster. An examination of the Katrina coverage also

illustrates the way the columnists sought to counter destructive discourse and racial animus that predated Obama's emergence (see Table 4).

The analysis found the story evolved from being mostly about race and class to a focus on the region's common folk, not identified as black or white, and an indictment of President George W. Bush —not just for "not caring about black people" as hip-hop artist Kanye West claimed, but also for failing to prepare the country in spite of the security changes he had pushed through after 9/11. Katrina then became a shorthand for the Bush administration's attitude toward blacks, as surveys showed that black Americans thought him to be racist (Brinkley, 2006). The columnists wrote about New Orleans throughout the next twelve months, which in the course of coverage developed its own racial shorthand: for instance, Ninth Ward no longer had to be identified as a black neighborhood.

On Wednesday, August 24, 2005, tropical storm Katrina was named. By Friday, the Mississippi and Louisiana governors declared a state of emergency. Sunday at 9:30 a.m., New Orleans Mayor Ray Nagin declared a mandatory evacuation; a few hours later, Katrina's winds reached 175 miles an hour and the National Hurricane Center warned that some New Orleans levees could be "overtopped" (National Geographic News, 2010). That evening, thousands of stranded people sought shelter in the Superdome in New Orleans. At daybreak Monday, with winds of 145 m.p.h., Katrina struck the Louisiana and Mississippi coasts with a 29-foot wall of water. By 8 a.m., Mayor Nagin reported

Table 4. Columns About Katrina
The time frame for these columns was August 29, 2005, to September 10, 2006.
In disaster's first week, the seven active columnists wrote from a racial perspective.

Columnist	Columns	Coverage	Frames
Colbert I. King Washington Post	2	Race/class; Condoleezza Rice's defense of Bush against racism charge	Devalued black life
Clarence Page, Chicago Tribune	6	Race and class, and poverty; praises Sen. Obama's remarks on race and class	Devalued black life; black responsibility
Leonard Pitts Jr., Miami Herald	21	Racial animus; race/class; incompetence, indifference by Bush administration and Louisiana officials; reports from Gulf Coast on residents (non-racial); Mayor Ray Nagin	Deconstructive discourse; misrepresentation; devalued black life; black responsibility (leadership)
Eugene Robinson, Washington Post	17	Race/class; Bush administration incompetence and indifference; environmental issues; reports from Gulf Coast on residents (mostly nonracial); reports on man-assisted disaster; Nagin	Devalued black life; Myth of black monolith
E.R. Shipp, New York Daily News	1	Missing black leadership; issue of whether Bush was racist	Black responsibility (black leadership); Deconstructive discourse
Cynthia Tucker, Atlanta Journal-Constitution	9	Race/class; conservative disregard for poor, including voter suppression; issue of whether Bush is racist; reports on man-assisted disaster; Nagin	Devalued black life (esp. by conservatives); misrepresentation
DeWayne Wickham, USA Today	3	Race/class; Nagin; Dillard University	Devalued black life; black responsibility

Sandy Banks, Charles M. Blow, Stephen Henderson, and Jason L. Riley were not columnists. Robinson and Tucker wrote a column about Katrina before it landed. Pitts and Robinson traveled to the Gulf Coast during first week of devastation. Page, Pitts, and Robinson returned to the Gulf Coast for Katrina's first anniversary. Robinson traveled to the Gulf Coast in January 2006. Wickham returned to New Orleans for the mayoral election in March 2006.

one New Orleans levee had failed. Later that morning, the eye again slammed into Mississippi, all but destroying Biloxi and Gulfport. After initial estimates of 1,300 dead, officials believe that more than 1,800 people in Louisiana and Mississippi died directly or indirectly from Katrina, but a definite death toll may never be determined (Olsen, 2010). At one New Orleans hospital, doctors decided which patients to evacuate while hastening the deaths of others (Fink, 2009). On September 6, New Orleans Police Chief Eddie Compass appeared on "Oprah" and claimed that "some of the little babies [were] getting raped" in the Superdome. Mayor Nagin added that people "have been in that frickin' Superdome for five days watching dead bodies, watching hooligans killing people, raping people" (Carr, 2005). The reports turned out to be exaggerated. The news media would later report that the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), headed by Michael D. Brown, had underestimated the storm and was ill equipped to handle the large-scale disaster. On Friday, President Bush toured Louisiana, promising to rebuild New Orleans and the Gulf Coast, and told the FEMA chief, "Brownie, you're doing a heck of a job." The remark became a metaphor for what his critics called his overall cluelessness. That night, during a live, televised fund-raiser for Katrina victims, the hip-hop star Kanye West blurted out that "George Bush doesn't care about black people."

By the time the columnists began writing about Katrina, they, along with the rest of the world, had seen the Third World conditions inside the Superdome (populated by dark-skinned people) and pictures of black people "looting." The columnists spent as

much time explaining looting as they did on the people in the Superdome. Clarence Page of *The Chicago Tribune* received a confrontational email asking: "Were you people even this disgusting in the jungle?" He wrote that unlike the email writer, "I'm not going to judge an entire group of people based on the bad behavior of a few" (2005, September 8). The columnists called the looting "heartbreaking" and "despicable" but countered the white perception that all black people loot by trying to partly remove race from the equation. Eugene Robinson of *The Washington Post* pointed out that post-Saddam Iraqis had looted Baghdad, which Donald Rumsfeld had understood (2005, September 2). Colbert I. King, also with *The Post*, brought up white corporate raiders and even 9/11 responders, noting that "greed is no respecter of pigmentation, income, status or social class" (2005, September 3). Using a Census statistic that other columnists cited, Leonard Pitts Jr. of *The Miami Herald* added that New Orleans was 67 percent black: "Given that looting is predictable under any significant breakdown of social order, who would you expect to find out there smashing windows when the lights go out? Ethnic Hawaiians?" (2005, September 3). Then he turned to a familiar theme, destructive discourse that highlights black failure:

> Besides which, white folks loot, too. Only it's not called looting when they do it. I refer you to a widely circulated news photo of a white couple wading through chest-high water after, in the words of the caption, "finding" food. As if that loaf of bread the woman has was just lying by the side of the road. (2005, September 3).

Pitts and King criticized the conservative agenda that placed rhetoric over relief. Robinson pointed out that New Orleans was two cities: an "affluent, small, achingly

lovely city that's mostly white, and a poor, big, unlovely city that's almost all black" (2005, September 2). He added that race/class maps of New Orleans perfectly align: where blacks live, where the poor and least educated live and the lowest-lying neighborhoods:

> In other words, blacks were less likely than whites to have the means to escape the city before Hurricane Katrina hit – less likely, even, to have the education to fully understand what was about to happen – and more likely to live in areas that would be inundated.
>
> No wonder that almost all of the multitudes stranded on their roofs, wading aimlessly through flooded streets and huddling in the Superdome are black. (2005, September 2)

Both Pitts and King insisted that energy spent on looting images was misspent. Pitts added: "American disunion being what it is these days, some look at even a natural disaster through the distorting prism of bigotry, rancor and fear":

> I'm sorry, but I have little patience for black people who find shame in this looting. Less patience for white ones who find vindication of their bigotry. It makes me angry that some people think these are the conversations we should be having now. (2005, September 3).

Cynthia Tucker of *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution* doubted that President Bush would make good on his pledge to help rebuild New Orleans, given that Congress had forgotten its pledges to New York after 9/11 (2005, September 4). While not mentioning race, she brought up class. Her sister, who lived in New Orleans, was safe in Atlanta with Tucker. Her sister had heard "little news of their neighborhood, although it's a pretty safe bet that their friends made it out OK. They are all among that group of Americans with the economic and social resources to rebound after a disaster" (2005, September 4).

E. R. Shipp of *The Daily News* wrote from the perspective of those who did not have those resources: " 'I don't know where nobody is,' a black woman, a refugee in her home, the U.S.A., told reporters early last week after Hurricane Katrina had wrecked life along the Gulf Coast. I don't know where nobody is — or was — either" (2005, September 4). Shipp instead was looking for black leaders, who she contended should have been helping those left behind:

> Where were the community leaders who should have insisted that folks in almost empty New Orleans, most of them black, leave and have the means to do so? Where were all those church buses and vans? A friend said all the church folks were probably on the buses and vans getting out of New Orleans as fast as possible and it was the unchurched who got left behind.
>
> Where were all those super-duper the-Lord-wants-you-to-be-rich preachers and their private planes? (2005, September 4)

Shipp seemed to defend the criminal element seen in the Katrina images but in the process renders them as pathological "problem people":

> The blackfolk I'm seeing who are most affected by Katrina and who are looting and shooting and doing stupid stuff that may be understandable given the conditions in which they are surviving are losers all the way around. They were most likely living in some of the worst sectors of a city that is below sea level. They did not have cars or other means of transportation. They did not have the education. They were accustomed to being victims. (2005, September 4)

The Chicago Tribune's Clarence Page, "hardly a member of President Bush's amen corner" and an owner of West's latest CD, disagreed with the artist's assessment of the president (2005, September 7). Page asserted that Louisiana Democrats shared the blame and told the story of a white suburb that FEMA had snubbed. But the issue, a familiar one for the columnist, was that politicians "did not care enough about people in need,

regardless of their race, especially the poor who, lacking the resources of the movers and shakers, get moved and shaken" (2005, September 7).

When Pitts wrote from the Gulf Coast, his columns focused on colorless people on the ground, described not as white or black but as folk (depicted as rural or Southern) doing the best they can. Pitts spoke to a farmer who was also in failing health: "When you're a farmer, you become an expert in the malice heaven sometimes holds toward Earth" (2008, September 9). He also wrote about a New Orleans police officer who committed suicide and a man sweeping the debris in his town because no one could. While Robinson would eventually write from the coast without mentioning race, his first column from New Orleans was racial as he described the scene at the airport:

> You thought you were in Haiti or Angola, not the United States, and you understood why so many of the people who survived the past week are filled with exhausted rage.
>
> On the lower level, where normally you would come to meet an arriving flight, thousands of people stood in a ragged line, wearing and carrying all they had in this world. I saw maybe a few dozen whites; all the rest were black. It was one of those Third World lines that goes nowhere for a long time, then lurches forward, then backs up, then stalls again. (2005, September 5)

After the initial weeks of coverage, Katrina became a nonracial shorthand for the Bush administration's incompetence, as Robinson did in this litany: "George W. Bush, whose administration is constantly being assailed by the media (rightfully, in my view) for Iraq, Katrina, secrecy, surveillance, deficits — the list goes on and on" (2006, March 14). Tucker wrote about Katrina through the prism of her recurring themes: (1) the conservative effort to further harm blacks and the poor, and (2) the harm of requiring the poor to have identification to vote because many, as Katrina showed, did not have cars.

During his campaign for re-election, Mayor Ray Nagin was criticized for promoting New Orleans as "Chocolate City," which Pitts, Wickham, and Robinson found alienating. Bill Cosby was mentioned twice as proof that the Ninth Ward had black support to rebuild. Pitts, following the lead of other black columnists, praised Tavis Smiley's effort for blacks to claim responsibility in face of government failure (2006, May 5).

As the anniversary approached, Tucker reminded readers of the mark Katrina left in America's already damaged racial discourse:

> It is quite nearly impossible to have a thoughtful discussion about race in America. We all bring our own prejudices and preconceptions to the conversation. Many black Americans also bring anger. Many whites bring denial, a need to believe the country is already colorblind. The very word "racism" is so loaded, so confrontational, so harsh that it is hardly conducive to civil debate. (2006, August 9).

Page was among the journalists who returned to New Orleans for the first anniversary of Katrina. He wrote that compared with other New Orleans neighborhoods, the Lower Ninth Ward "is Pluto — remote, disrespected and feeling devalued." One Ninth Ward resident took Page on a tour, and the columnist wrote that he saw "a Lower Ninth Ward that defied the usual media stereotypes":

> Contrary to its media image as a den of poverty and crime, the ward was mostly a middle-class and working-class bungalow community with a 65-percent home ownership rate — one of the highest in the region. We visited some homeowners who have repaired their house and moved back in. Reinvestment is happening slowly, despite the city's sluggish political process. (2006, August 29)

The columns about Katrina reflected the columnists' concern about race and class in America and, as the preceding example shows, the continuing destructive discourse about race and class in America. But as the columnists worked to shatter the myth of the black

monolith, they also made the New Orleans poor more of an "other" and more one of "them." Those stranded in the Superdome were indeed "problem people."

THE HENRY LOUIS GATES ARREST

Three years before the black teenager Trayvon Martin was killed by a white Hispanic on neighborhood watch duty in a gated community in Florida, African-American scholar Henry Louis Gates of Harvard University was arrested for disorderly conduct outside his Cambridge, Massachusetts, home in 2009. These black columnists did not link the two incidents, which had vastly different outcomes. However an analysis of their work finds their approach to the Gates arrest and the Martin killing – along with their reaction to the discourse animus following each incident, inflamed by the presence of an African-American president – to be strikingly similar. Many of the columns about Gates presaged commentary on Trayvon, when the columnists hammered home the frames comprising their black American historical narrative: devalued black life, misrepresentation, destructive discourse, racial responsibility, and faith in the Constitution and American ideals. With the benefit of hindsight, the Gates columns can be read as unsuccessfully trying to prevent the Trayvon tragedy by summoning those same frames to enlighten white Americans (see Table 5).

On July 19, 2009, a white woman called the Cambridge, Massachusetts, police after seeing two black men force open the door of a nearby home. Gates, returning home after a trip to China, and his cab driver were opening his jammed front door. Gates

Table 5. Columns on the Henry Louis Gates Arrest

Seven columnists wrote about the 2009 arrest of Harvard scholar Henry Louis Gates, employing frames found throughout their work.

Columnist	Date	Headline	Frame
Sandy Banks, Los Angeles Times	7/25	A power play, not prejudice	Destructive discourse
Charles M. Blow, New York Times	7/25	Welcome to the 'Club'	Devalued black life, misrepresentation
Clarence Page, Chicago Tribune	7/26	A clear case of 'contempt of cop'	Destructive discourse
Leonard Pitts Jr., Miami Herald	7/26	Take a good look at Henry Louis Gates	Devalued black life, misrepresentation
DeWayne Wickham, USA Today	7/28	If only the Gates arrest had been an aberration	Devalued black life
Eugene Robinson, Washington Post	7/28	Pique and the Professor	Misrepresentation
Leonard Pitts Jr., Miami Herald	7/29	A black man's fear	Devalued black life; misrepresentation; damaged discourse
Clarence Page, Chicago Tribune	8/2	Obama's brew-ha-ha	Damaged discourse
Colbert I. King, Washington Post	8/1	Cold Beer and Cold Comfort for Rights	Devalued black life, constitutional rights
DeWayne Wickham, USA Today	8/11	Obama can't neglect race	Devalued black life

Stephen Henderson, Jason L. Riley, and Cynthia Tucker did not write about the arrest; E. R. Shipp no longer wrote a *Daily News* column in 2009.

became belligerent when a white police officer, James Crawley, responded to the call and demanded that the professor step outside. The officer eventually arrested Gates on charges of disorderly conduct, which were dropped. President Obama, asked about the incident during a press conference, replied that the officer had "acted stupidly," fueling conservative vitriol. He amended his stance — "I could have calibrated those words differently" — and organized a White House photo op in which he, Gates, and Crawley

shared a beer to talk over their differences.

Seven columnists wrote ten times about the incident, relying on themes that fit the pattern of their work as a whole. Miami's Leonard Pitts Jr., *USA Today's* DeWayne Wickham, *The New York Times'* Charles M. Blow, and *The Post's* Colbert I. King called the Gates' arrest a high-profile example of unchecked racial profiling facing black men. Blow sadly welcomed Gates to what he called "the club": "the fact that a negative, sometimes racially charged, encounter with a policeman is a far-too-common rite of passage" for black men. Blow wrote of a police officer who had drawn his gun at him and a college friend during a traffic stop on a Louisiana road two decades earlier:

> Then he said something I will never forget: that if he wanted to, he could make us lie down in the middle of the road and shoot us in the back of the head and no one would say anything about it. Then he walked to his car and drove away.
>
> He had raised the specter of executing us. He wanted to impress upon us his power and our worth, or lack thereof. We were shocked, afraid, humiliated and furious. We were the good guys — dean's list students with academic scholarships. I was the freshman class president. This wasn't supposed to happen to us. (2009, July 25).

Blow wrote that he was particularly troubled after his friend's father suggested that they should be happy to be alive. Pitts included his own harrowing tale among those victims of racist profiling because "they don't see you":

> And if Gates looked like a lawbreaker to James Crowley, well, to me he looks like former Los Angeles Lakers star Jamaal Wilkes, pulled over because the tags on his car were "about to" expire, like clean-shaven, 6-foot-4 businessman Earl Graves Jr. detained by police searching for a mustachioed 5-foot-10 suspect, like Amadou Diallo, executed while reaching for his wallet.
>
> And like me, with hands up and a rifle trained on my chest by an officer who later claimed he stopped me in that predominantly-white neighborhood for a traffic violation.

> Because I look like Henry Louis Gates, he looks like Jamaal Wilkes, and we all look like some dangerous, predatory black man intent on mayhem. So there is no shock here — only a sobering reminder that the old canard is, at some level, true.
>
> We all look alike. (2005, July 26)

Some columnists saw the issue in more than black and white. Banks wrote that at first she was angered by the arrest but then changed her mind after learning of Gates' tirade. Instead, she insisted, "we ought to stop seeing this as a referendum on racism and ask what it says about the attitude police officers display toward the taxpayers who fund their paychecks" (2009, July 25). *The Post's* Eugene Robinson saw race as playing a part in Gates' arrest but also contended that "the debate — really more of a shouting match — is also about power and entitlement" (2009, July 28). Robinson, who lived in Cambridge for a year, wrote that he could "attest that meeting a famous Harvard professor who happens to be arrogant is like meeting a famous basketball player who happens to be tall." But he surmised that race did indeed play into the dynamic, that "there was something about the power relationship involved — uppity, jet-setting black professor vs. regular-guy, working-class white cop — that Crowley couldn't abide" (2009, July 28). He put the power struggle between the officer and the scholar in the context of the recent Supreme Court confirmation hearings of Sonia Sotomayor, and the conservative fixation on having once described herself as a "wise Latina":

> The odd and inappropriate line of questioning by Sen. Lindsey Graham (R-S.C.) about Sotomayor's temperament was widely seen as sexist, and indeed it was. But I suspect the racial or ethnic power equation was also a factor — the idea of a sharp-tongued "wise Latina" making nervous attorneys, some of them white male attorneys, fumble and squirm. (2009, July 28)

The columnists revealed the entrenched burden on black men dealing with law enforcement. *The Tribune's* Clarence Page and *The Post's* King each saw Gates' arrest as an example of "contempt of cop," when police use disorderly conduct charges against those violating unwritten rules of police etiquette (2009, August 1). Pitts similarly pointed out that Gates had failed "Black 101" and "Common Sense 101" (2009, July 26). But Pitts added that it was "equally obvious to some of us that a white man, whose only 'crime' was complaining, would likely have enjoyed more leeway than Gates did" (2009, July 29). Robinson wondered whether the outcome would have been different if former Harvard President Lawrence Summers had been involved (2009, July 28).

Blow, whose July 25 column is personal and mournful, recalled as a child he had been taught to be "leery" of the police: "As my mother would say, they were to be 'fed with a long-handled spoon.' " He lamented that his sons later witnessed their father being unfairly treated by a police officer. After being accused of talking on his phone while driving, which Blow had denied, he received a second ticket for driving without a seatbelt:

> My kids were flabbergasted. They knew the officer was wrong, so they began to protest. I quieted them. When the officer drove off, I had a frank talk with them.
>
> I told them that although most officers are brave and honorable men and women doing their best to protect and serve, there were, unfortunately, some bad seeds. Although I could not be sure that race had had any bearing on what the officer had done, I felt the need to tell my boys that as black men, we may sometimes take more of the brunt of those bad officers' actions. As I spoke, my heart sank. Despite my best efforts to prevent it, the cycle of suspicion and mutual mistrust was tumbling forward into yet another generation. My children were one step closer to joining the "club." (2009, July 25)

Pitts, alluding to white privilege, wrote that whites who did not think the Gates arrest was racially motivated, had the luxury of "never connecting the dots" despite recent cases of police brutality and misconduct against black men. On the other hand, blacks have no choice but to carry the burden "like luggage, wear the residue like sweat, into every encounter with every cop, both good and bad: not always memories of what did happen, but fear of what could" (2009, July 29).

The news story shifted from Gates' perceived sense of entitlement to President Obama's initial comment of the police acting "stupidly," which conservatives painted as racist. Page wrote that the president learned: "It's OK for a biracial president to talk about race, but don't take sides," adding that "Americans look to Obama to be an honest broker between the races" (2009, August 2). To Page, the reaction to the president's remarks as well as the acrimony of the Sotomayor hearings further illustrated the fractured state of discourse, especially as the use of the word "racist" devolves:

> Reports of a "post-racial" America after Obama's election were greatly exaggerated. If anything, we are a trans-racial country. As Judge Sonia Sotomayor's Supreme Court confirmation hearings illustrated, we Americans suspiciously watch one another across racial, ethnic, gender and cultural lines as we uneasily shed our white, male-supremacist past.
>
> We attune our cultural antenna and react sharply to any signs of preference shown to any group besides the one to which we happen to belong. That's nothing new for women or nonwhites. Men and whites are still getting used to it. (2009, August 2).

Robinson wrote that the president's initial "choice of words might not have been politic, but he was merely stating the obvious when he said the police behaved

'stupidly' " (2009, July 28). Pitts also explained why the president, "usually the smartest cookie in the jar," had not done "the politically intelligent thing":

> I think he looked at Henry Louis Gates and saw his brother-in-law, his nephew, maybe himself if he were not who he is. I think he did what black men habitually do when news breaks of some brother beat down, gunned down or simply thrown down and handcuffed for no good reason: he breathed, "There, but for the grace of God ... " (2009, July 29).

A month later, Wickham mused that if President Obama could rethink his comments about the Cambridge police, he could also change his mind about refusing to focus on issues directly affecting African-Americans. Wickham then returned to a familiar theme to do more than criticize the president:

> Too many blacks — especially black journalists — are reluctant to ask tough questions about what the Obama administration is doing to improve the lives of African Americans. They fear it will embarrass the president, or give his political enemies something to use against him. I worry that not raising these questions — or not getting good answers when we do — will do even greater damage.
>
> Black voters turned out in record numbers to put Obama in the White House. Like any other members of a winning coalition, blacks expect, and deserve, to reap some benefits of the victory they helped make possible. (2009, August 11)

The Post's King, who embraced being the voice of the voiceless, saw President Obama missing out on an opportunity to do more for people without Gates' clout, noting sharply that he and the professor "don't share the same circles" (2009, August 1). Although he understood the president's "lowering the temperature over the Gates arrest," King complained that unwarranted arrests happen "far too often in this country, especially to the poor, the politically unpopular and people too financially weak to stand up for themselves." King contended that a trumped-up disorderly conduct charge, even

when dropped, "offends the Constitution." But Obama's ignoring the issue meant that "a lot of citizens will continue to pay a steep and unfair price":

> Obama the politician trumped Obama the law professor, and he punted on the opportunity to teach an important lesson to the American people about the First Amendment, police powers and citizens' rights. The president instead settled for sending a message of racial harmony when, in fact, race and law enforcement are sores on the body politic. Unwarranted arrests are the bane of people and communities without clout. Obama and Gates know it. Beer and smiles all around won't make that fact go away. Neither will the continued abuse of "disorderly conduct" laws (2009, August 1).

THE TRAYVON MARTIN KILLING

The fatal shooting of Trayvon Martin, a 17-year-old African American, on February 26, 2012, was slow to gain national attention until the massive social media response to his death could not be ignored. All nine of the active columnists wrote multiple columns about the unarmed teenager, including the trial of his shooter (see Table 6). The almost 50 columns written about the case are representative of the findings: the presence of a historical black narrative; the vital role of the personal in writing about race, and the use of six frames within the narrative. The columns also show the continuing importance of Martin Luther King Jr. as moral authority.

Martin and his father were guests at a townhouse in a gated community in Stanford, Florida. Wearing a hooded sweatshirt on a rainy night, he was returning to the townhouse after a trip to a convenience store when he was spotted by George Zimmerman, a 28-year-old neighborhood watch captain armed with a 9-mm handgun and

Table 6. Columns on the Trayvon Martin Killing

In 2012 and 2013, the nine active columnists all commented on the Trayvon Martin and Jordan Davis shootings, as well as Stand Your Ground Laws, Obama's comments about the Martin story and George Zimmerman trial.

Columnist	Columns	Topics and Frames
Sandy Banks, Los Angeles Times	4	Justice and protests, hopelessness after verdict, coverage of California protest
Charles M. Blow, New York Times	12	Interview with mother in which race is not mentioned; justice prevails with Zimmerman charge; After verdict: "Sadness lingers." "Whole system failed," "What do I tell my sons?"
Stephen Henderson, Detroit Free Press	2	Time to look at black-on-black crimes; after verdict, black life is cheap
Colbert I. King, Washington Post	2	Devaluation of black life and need for justice; Need to help Afghan boys who are sexual slaves
Leonard Pitts, Jr. Miami Herald	12	Devaluation of black life; misrepresentation (invisibility); damaged discourse; Jordan Davis. After verdict, blacks need to "wake the hell up"; death of white murder victim not the same;
Clarence Page, Chicago Tribune	6	Stand Your Ground laws; damaged discourse; why Zimmerman not guilty; Death of white murder victim not similar
Jason L. Riley, Wall Street Journal	2	Validity of Stand Your Ground laws
Eugene Robinson, Washington Post	5	Black life is cheap, misrepresentation, deconstructive discourse
DeWayne Wickham, USA Today	10	Stanford police; Stand Your Ground laws, divert attention from Martin story to black-on-black crime; Jordan Davis, misguided verdict

By 2012, Cynthia Tucker and E. R. Shipp no longer wrote their newspaper columns.

sitting in his SUV. Zimmerman called 911:

> Hey we've had some break-ins in my neighborhood, and there's a real suspicious guy, uh … This guy looks like he's up to no good, or he's on drugs or something. It's raining and he's just walking around, looking about.

Zimmerman confirmed to the dispatcher that the person he was observing is a black male who had "his hand in his waistband." Zimmerman told the dispatcher, "These assholes, they always get away," and ignored her advice that he not follow Martin, who was talking to a friend on his cell phone, telling her that someone was following him. Zimmerman, who outweighed the teenager by 50 to 100 pounds, and Martin confronted each other, prompting other 911 calls in which yelling, screaming and a gunshot could be heard. When the police arrived, Zimmerman had a bloody nose and Martin had been fatally shot in the chest. The police found a bag of Skittles and a bottled drink on Trayvon's body. His body was taken to the medical examiner's office, tested for drugs and alcohol, and tagged as a "John Doe." Zimmerman claimed self-defense under Florida's Stand Your Ground law and was not charged. According to *The Times'* Charles M. Blow:

> The father called the Missing Persons Unit. No luck. Then he called 911. The police asked the father to describe the boy, after which they sent officers to the house where the father was staying. There they showed him a picture of the boy with blood coming out of his mouth. (2012, March 17)

While the shooting was the top story for a nearby Orlando TV station the next day, Martin's death did not become national news until mid-March, thanks to black journalists who took the story personally (Stelter, 2012). According to a *New York Times*

article, “That Trayvon’s name is known at all is a testament to his family, which hired a tenacious lawyer to pursue legal action and to persuade sympathetic members of the news media to cover the case” (Stelter, 2012). The article reported that *The Times’* Blow and other black journalists were urged on by their Facebook and Twitter followers:

> “People started sending me tweets saying, ‘What are you going to say about this case?’ ” Mr. Blow recalled.
>
> He then looked up local stories about it, contacted Mr. Crump, and arranged for an interview with Trayvon’s mother, Sybrina Fulton. “They were very open to talking, and that was very important,” he said. (Stelter, 2012)

Following nationwide attention – on March 23, President Obama commented, “You know, if I had a son, he'd look like Trayvon” – a special prosecutor charged Zimmerman with second-degree murder, six weeks after Martin had been shot. In July 2013, a six-woman jury found Zimmerman not guilty.

When the shooting became national news, the columnists relied on two related frames: the misrepresentation of young black men and the devaluation of black life. In the columnists’ view, misrepresentation caused Zimmerman to suspect Martin “was up to no good” and the Stanford police to treat Martin’s body so callously; Zimmerman and the Stanford police each proved that black life was indeed cheap. After the verdict, Blow asked: “Do we need a clean, binary narrative of good guys and bad guys to draw moral conclusions about right and wrong?” (2013, July 13). In the case of Trayvon Martin, the overwhelming majority of columnists answered yes. But they also saw Martin and Zimmerman symbolizing 300 years of an imperfect, evolving America.

As he did with the Gates arrest, Blow took the Martin shooting personally. He laid

his emotions bare for his readers:

> As the father of two black teenage boys, this case hits close to home. This is the fear that seizes me whenever my boys are out in the world: that a man with a gun and an itchy finger will find them "suspicious." That passions may run hot and blood run cold. That it might all end with a hole in their chest and hole in my heart. That the law might prove insufficient to salve my loss (2012, March 17).

Robinson and Page, who also reminded readers of their young sons, warned against comparing Martin's killing to the murder of 14-year-old Emmett Till in Mississippi, though both served as markers of their eras. Page wrote that Till's murderers "were enforcing the old South's willfully racist political and social system" (2012, April 18). But they connected the deaths of the two teenagers to advance the black narrative. Page hoped that Martin protestors could channel their anger and energy positively, reminding readers that Till's murder "inspired Rosa Parks a few months later to refuse to give up her seat to a white man on a segregated bus. Her move helped to launch the Montgomery bus boycotts, a decade of protests and landmark civil rights legislation" (2012, April 25). Robinson saw the two deaths as indicative of what could happen to young blacks in unfamiliar situations. Till, a Chicagoan, was visiting Mississippi when he was murdered:

> Young black men who were born and raised in the South knew where the red lines were drawn, understood the unwritten code of behavior that made the difference between survival and mortal danger. Till didn't.
>
> Today, young black men grow up in a society where racism is no longer deemed acceptable. Many live in integrated neighborhoods, attend integrated schools, have interracial relationships. They wonder why their parents prattle on so tediously about race, warning about this or that or the other, when their own youthful experience tells them that race doesn't matter.
>
> … But the tragic and essential thing, for me, is the bull's-eye that black

> men wear throughout their lives — and the vital imperative to never, ever, be caught on the wrong street at the wrong time (2012, March 23)

Robinson again railed against the myth of the black monolith and pointed out how misrepresentation cast a wide net beyond black teenagers:

> For every black man in America, from the millionaire in the corner office to the mechanic in the local garage, the Trayvon Martin tragedy is personal. It could have been me or one of my sons. It could have been any of us. (2012, March 23)

To Pitts, who referred to Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*, this misrepresentation meant "invisibility" for blacks coupled with "blindness" by white America. This ailment, which he referred to in the Gates arrest, is an enduring, hurtful part of the black narrative:

> They do not see you.
>
> For every African American, it comes as surely as hard times, setback and tears, that moment when you realize somebody is looking right at you and yet, not seeing you — as if you had become cellophane, as if you had become air, as if somehow, some way, you were right there and yet at the same time, not.
>
> … That's one of the great frustrations of African-American life, those times when you are standing right there, minding your business, tending your house, coming home from the store, and other people are looking right at you, yet do not see you.
>
> …They see instead their own superstitions and suppositions, paranoia and guilt, night terrors and vulnerabilities. They see the perpetrator, the suspect, the mug shot, the dark and scary face that lurks at the open windows of their vivid imaginings. They see the unknown, the inassimilable, the other.
>
> They see every damn thing in the world but you.
>
> And their blindness costs you. First and foremost, it costs your sacred individuality. But it may also cost you a job, an education, your freedom. If you are unlucky like Trayvon Martin, it may even cost your life. (2012, March 17)

The columnists insisted that Zimmerman's ethnicity – his father is white and his mother is Hispanic – did not mitigate the racial injustice of Martin's killing. As Robinson contended: "The issue isn't Zimmerman's race or ethnicity; it's the hair-trigger assumption he made that 'black male' equals 'up to no good' " (March 23, 2012). Most

columnists called him a white Hispanic; King described him as "nonblack." Pitts used the revelation of Zimmerman's ethnicity as an opportunity to once again expose white domination and white privilege, part of the critical race consciousness frame. He noted that even the term "race" was "both meaningful and yet, profoundly meaningless":

> It is meaningful in the sense that it provides a tool for tribalism and a means by which to organize our biases, fears, observations, social challenges and sundry cultural products. It is meaningless in the sense that, well ... it has no meaning, that there exists no definition of "black" or "white" that carries any degree of scientific precision. (2012, March 25)

After explaining how immigrants to the United States had to earn their whiteness, Pitts tackled the issue of slavery and race, noting that Africans kidnapped into slavery did not think of themselves as "black":

> They were Mandinkan, Fulani, Mende, Songhay, Wolof. "Black" was something imposed upon them as justification for slavery and other means of exploitation. As one historian puts it: Africans did not become slaves because they were black. They became black because they were enslaved.

White privilege, Pitts wrote, was not just about wealth but about a previously unspoken benefit of the doubt, "the sense of having one's personhood and individuality respected, a privilege so basic I doubt it registers with many whites as privilege at all":

> Consider that, then consider the fair-skinned Hispanic man, George Zimmerman, who evidently stalked and killed an unarmed kid he wrongly thought was up to no good, yet was not arrested, nor even initially investigated. He said it was self-defense. Police took him at his word and sent him on his way.
>
> Folks, that's not just white. It's blinding. (2012, March 25)

Pitts criticized white America's reflex of not rushing to judgment in these cases:

> I find myself wondering: when is the last time I saw anyone who is not black look at one of those episodes where the justice system failed African-American people — look at Trayvon, look at Jena, La., look at Tulia, Texas, look at Amadou

> Diallo, look at Abner Louima — and say, unprompted and unambiguously, that thus and so happened because of race. (2012, April 5)

He also predicted how readers would react to his latest insistence on talking about race:

> Indeed, more than once, someone has actually told me there'd be no racial problems in this country 'if you didn't talk about it.' What a piece of logic that is: ignore it and it will go away.
>
> Such people, Martin Luther King once observed, mistake silence for peace. Silence is not peace.

As she had asserted with the Gates arrest, Banks wrote that the case was "not just about the color of skin, but the color of authority":

> It's about a neighborhood bully allowed to carry a gun, encouraged by a reckless law to wield it and absolved by local police, who had barely begun to investigate before declaring the killer "squeaky clean." (2012, March 25)

All of the columnists (except for Riley) called for a repeal of Stand Your Ground laws and complained that if the circumstances had been reversed, Martin would have been immediately arrested and charged (e.g., Wickham, 2012, December 4). Riley on the other hand cited statistics that states with Stand Your Ground laws had fewer gun-related crime deaths (2013, July 15). Banks and Blow saw hope in the youthful protests in the Martin story and praised their understanding of injustice. Wickham noted the belated role of the NAACP and the Reverends Jessie Jackson and Al Sharpton in the protest:

> Unlike the old days of the movement that transformed America, they were riding the waves of this protest, rather than creating them. That's not an indictment of these men, but rather an acknowledgment of their ability to take control of a movement created largely by social media. As a result, the campaign to get Martin's killer arrested and tried on murder charges has brought about an interesting fusion of the old and the new. (2012, April 3)

But Wickham and Stephen Henderson wondered where was the outrage for victims of

black-on-black crime and evoked the frame of black responsibility. Henderson's first column on the Martin story expressed concern for the injustice in the Martin story, but swiftly turned to what he considered a more pressing concern for African Americans:

> What have we done for Delric? Or Kade'jah? Or Je'Rean?
>
> They were black kids, too. They were innocent. And they were killed for stupid, stupid reasons right here in Detroit.
>
> Is it because their killings had nothing to do with racism that their deaths didn't evoke such passion or spark nationwide social media campaigns?
>
> Does combatting racial stereotypes — which is about fighting one of the black community's external foes — command an easier mental and emotional response than confronting the demons that exist between and among African Americans? (2012, March 25)

Henderson contended the deaths of these black children raised "far more serious questions about how we, as African Americans, deal with one another, how we value life and manage disputes, and how far we've allowed our communities to sink into moral chaos" (2012, March 25). Writing from Stanford, Florida, where protests called for Zimmerman's indictment, Wickham began his third column on the Martin story: "I want justice for Trayvon Martin. But even more than that, I want an end to the slaughter of the many blacks for whom there were no mass protest demonstrations or rabid news media coverage" (2012, March 25). On this point, Wickham and Riley were in rare agreement, citing similar statistics showing that blacks commit a disproportionate amount of crime. Wickham tied the murder rate to the destabilization of neighborhoods:

> Taking on this problem is no civil rights photo op. … But the payoff for solving it would be huge. It could stabilize black communities.
>
> As it is, the killing fields in black neighborhoods have fueled the flight of upper-income and middle-class blacks to safer places. Left behind in the urban war zones are those blacks who are too poor to escape. (2012, April 10)

Riley actually argued that the misrepresentation that other columnists complain about is indeed a fair representation:

> Did the perception of black criminality play a role in Martin's death? We may never know for certain, but we do know that those negative perceptions of young black men are rooted in hard data on who commits crimes. We also know that young black men will not change how they are perceived until they change how they behave. (2013, July 15)

Riley turned to Martin Luther King Jr. as moral support for his argument and to criticize contemporary civil rights leadership, "who choose to keep the focus on white racism instead of personal responsibility, but their predecessors knew better":

> "Do you know that Negroes are 10 percent of the population of St. Louis and are responsible for 58% of its crimes? We've got to face that. And we've got to do something about our moral standards," Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. told a congregation in 1961. "We know that there are many things wrong in the white world, but there are many things wrong in the black world, too. We can't keep on blaming the white man. There are things we must do for ourselves." (2013, July 15).

Wickham wrote two more columns comparing the attention given to the Martin story by media and the black community with the inattention to black-on-black murder victims. He noted after the verdict: "What Zimmerman did to Martin should have landed him in jail. But it is not the rare act of white-on-black killings that turns black neighborhoods into killing fields" (2013, July 30).

As happened in the Gates case, President Obama's comment on Martin – "If I had a son, he'd look like Trayvon" – brought conservative charges of racism and his playing the race card. Black columnists found his comment appropriate and further proof of the ubiquity of racial profiling. Page used the controversy over Obama's remark to return to

one of his favorite topics and a frame used by all the columnists, destructive racial discourse and the definition of racism (2012, March 28). He pointed out that it was "customary in the wake of a major racial eruption to say that we Americans need to have a national conversation on race." Yet he asserted that Obama's election had affected racial discourse:

> Ironically, the election of the nation's first black or, if you prefer, biracial president, has made it more difficult to talk about race. Newt Gingrich, among some other conservative commentators, even objected to President Barack Obama's mild acknowledgment of how the case resonated with him personally.
>
> … My question is: How can we deal with racism if we are so skittish about recognizing that race exists? (2012, March 28)

Blow surmised that the Zimmerman trial "produced a valuable and profound dialogue in America about some important issues surrounding race and justice, fear and aggression, and legal guilt and moral culpability" (2013, July 11). Others were less sure. In a 2013 column about a survey measuring racism and how the term has been compromised, Page returned to the president's remark on Martin: "When even Obama gets slammed for an innocent tribute after all of his years of diligently playing by the rules of today's racial etiquette, it is no wonder that so many people think black folks are racist" (2013, July 11). After the Zimmerman verdict, Robinson wrote that the president would be the "worst" moderator for a national conversation, fearing the racial animus that would ensue: "The record indicates that honest talk from Obama about race is seen by many people as threatening" (2013, July 19). But Robinson was pleasantly surprised by the president's personal response, in which he spoke of being racially profiled. The columnists also cringed when polls taken in 2012 and 2013 revealed a racial divide

among blacks and whites in regard to the Martin story, with a majority of blacks assuming race was behind Zimmerman's actions while most whites did not. Gallup likened the divide to public opinion following the O.J. Simpson trial in 1995, a comparison that Blow called "loaded" because Martin was the victim. Although Blow wrote that he thought Simpson was as guilty "as the day was long," he acknowledged "there is an important, if strained, commonality between them: the issue of equal treatment by the justice system" (2012, April 7).

The Zimmerman indictment spurred Blow to employ another frame as he celebrated the best of American ideals, which he pointedly did not describe in racial terms. He wrote that America "rose up" to hear "the calls for justice from a Florida family":

> Thousands marched in the streets. Millions signed petitions online. Hearts poured out for justice to rain down. This is a moment when America should be proud.
>
> … America doesn't always get it right, but she is in her greatest glory when she turns her face toward righteousness. She is not perfect, but men and women of good will and good conscience toil endlessly to make her better.
>
> And, in this case, America seems to be finally getting it right because equal justice under the law is one of her greatest ideals. (2012, April 14)

On the other hand, after the indictment Pitts compared the Martin story to the Rodney King beating and the Los Angeles riots that occurred 20 years earlier, noting that two are not "dissimilar" in "one telling aspect: delay."

> It took a ruinous riot and a new federal trial for Rodney King to receive anything approaching justice. It took 46 days, uncounted public demonstrations and the appointment of a special prosecutor for that process even to begin for Trayvon Martin. Historically, that has always been the problem when African Americans seek redress of grievances pregnant with racial overtones. Justice comes slowly, grudgingly, and grumblingly, when it comes at all. (2012, April 30).

In 2013, six women found Zimmerman not guilty of second-degree murder and declined a manslaughter conviction. The columnists' distress was palpable. Even though Banks wrote that she was not surprised, the verdict left her "not so much angry, but heartsick and numb" (2013, July 15). She added it might be "legally correct, but it isn't moral justice. It's a perversion of right and wrong" (2013, July 15). Henderson wrote that his job was "typically to make policy sense of news events. But here, I'm at a loss":

> As a parent, as an African American, I can't get much past thinking Zimmerman has earned every day of the hell his life should be from here on out. Injustice? I hope it visits with him often.
>
> But my bigger fear in the wake of Zimmerman's acquittal is for the rest of us. The 300 million people we call Americans, so laden with the awful history of racial injustice and now tossed back into the cauldron of resentment and anger and sadness that has boiled our emotions for more than three centuries. (2013, July 15)

The columnists returned to the frames of misrepresentation and the devaluation of black life. Some wondered, as Henderson did: "What, for instance, do I make of this for my 9-year-old son? A little brown-skinned boy who sometimes wears a hoodie and who someday, like Martin, might be walking home from the store with a pack of Skittles" (2013, July 15). Blow spelled out how the Zimmerman shooting and acquittal had complicated an already dangerous calculus:

> We used to say not to run in public because that might be seen as suspicious, like they'd stolen something. But according to Zimmerman, Martin drew his suspicion at least in part because he was walking too slowly.
>
> So what do I tell my boys now? At what precise pace should a black man walk to avoid suspicion?
>
> And can they ever stop walking away, or running away, and simply stand their ground? Can they become righteously indignant without being fatally wounded? (2013, July 16)

Robinson wrote that society assumed young black men "to be dangerous, interchangeable, expendable, guilty until proven innocent":

> If anyone wonders why African Americans feel so passionately about this case, it's because we know that our 17-year-old sons are boys, not men. It's because we know their adolescent bravura is just that — an imitation of manhood, not the real thing.
>
> We know how frightened our sons would be, walking home alone on a rainy night and realizing they were being followed. We know how torn they would be between a child's fear and a child's immature idea of manly behavior. We know how they would struggle to decide the right course of action, flight or fight. (2013, July 16)

Blow placed the Martin story in the black historical narrative: "Unfortunately, these sorts of defining moments keep coming. I have James Byrd Jr. My parents had Emmett Till. My children have Trayvon Martin" (2013, December 19). Banks called it a "painful narrative that, over generations, black people have grown accustomed to":

> And it's a sobering reality check for a young generation encouraged to believe instead in limitless individuality. My children have grown up in a black-man-can-be-president world. Now they have to accept that an unarmed black kid can be killed with impunity if someone thinks he just might possibly — with no evidence — be up to no good. (2013, July 15)

Pitts, as usual, was blunt in his assessment of what the verdict meant to black America, especially in the era of a black president. He wrote, "Four words of advice for African-Americans in the wake of George Zimmerman's acquittal: Wake the hell up."

> Every period of African-American advance has always been met by a crushing period of push-back, the crafting of laws and the use of violence with the intent of eroding the new freedoms. (2013, July 16)

He noted that "while we were organizing Obama victory parties, they were organizing tea parties." Banks wrote that the verdict seemed "like history being replayed, progress

erased. It calls to mind my parents' stories of life in the South, when black safety depended on white goodwill and submission kept you in the authorities' good graces" 2013, July 16).

Before the verdict, Blow had warned would-be rioters: "Justice is sometimes a journey. It doesn't always lead to where you think it should" (July 11, 2013). After the verdict, Henderson affirmed that notion: "Our justice system is the world's greatest, but it depends on our own individual sense of right and wrong to deliver fairness or rectitude. We aren't there yet" (July 15, 2013).

These three case studies — of the Katrina devastation, the Gates arrest, and the Trayvon killing — show how the columnists used black narrative and its attendant frames in three high-profile racial stories. The events were very different, and the Gates arrest in Cambridge, Massachusetts, put to rest any assumption that class is always an inherent factor in racial issues. But the columnists' similar approaches to the events illustrate that not only is news cyclical but so is racial discourse.

Chapter 8: In Their Own Words

Textual analysis of the columns yielded significant findings regarding the ways elite black journalists commented on race. In-depth interviews with them also provided insight into how black columnists approached race and their role in shaping racial discourse. Five research questions were designed to help analyze the columnists' perception of their racialized texts. The first two dealt with their roles in the newsroom:

> **RQ3:** What do black columnists say about their autonomy in the newsroom?
> **RQ3a:** How do black columnists describe their sense, if any, of duality?

The next three research questions centered on their writing about race, their readers and racial discourse as a whole:

> **RQ4:** How do black columnists describe writing about race?
> **RQ4a:** How does thinking about their readership influence their writing about race, and vice versa?
> **RQ4b**: How do black columnists discuss racial discourse, and their role in shaping it, in their own words?

Through email and telephone messages, the 11 analyzed columnists were asked to participate in a one-hour interview. Five were interviewed (listed in the order in which they were interviewed) Dewayne Wickham of *USA Today*; Sandy Banks of *The Los Angeles Times*; Leonard Pitts of *The Miami Herald*; Eugene Robinson of *The Washington Post*; and Stephen Henderson of *The Detroit Free Press*. All were interviewed by telephone, in conversations that usually lasted about an hour.[13]

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[13] Jason L. Riley of *The Wall Street Journal* declined after repeated email discussion; the ten other columnists agreed. However, five could not be scheduled for interviews despite repeated contact and attempts to set up their participation.

The interviews were conducted after the columnists' work had been analyzed so specific questions about columns and their themes could be asked. These were wide-ranging discussions that often ventured into the particular avenues for each columnist – Wickham on his disdain for Black History Month and the roots of the Monroe Trotter Group, the black columnists organization he helped found; Banks on the stereotypes facing single mothers; Pitts on his distaste for rap music and his rhetorical battle against the N-word; Robinson on how writing a memoir eased his transition to the personal style of column-writing; Henderson on future projects in the Detroit neighborhood where he grew up.

The research questions, especially RQ4 — How do black columnists describe writing about race? — were answered throughout these discussions and the ones the columnists provided to similarly worded questions on newsroom autonomy; the duality of being African American and journalists; the role of biography and professional experience in their writing about race; the evolution of racial discourse; whether they considered themselves leaders, civic or among black Americans; the importance of history in writing about race, and the ways that they connected to their audiences.

AUTONOMY

To answer RQ3 —What do black columnists say about their autonomy in the newsrooms? — the columnists were asked to rate their autonomy on a scale from 1 to 10 overall, and then about writing about race. Leonard Pitts Jr., Eugene Robinson, and Stephen Henderson — three Pulitzer Prize winners — indicated they had complete

autonomy and were subjected only to line editing of their columns. They had control over what they wrote about.

However DeWayne Wickham and Sandy Banks, neither of whom has won the Pulitzer or serve on their publications' editorial boards, spoke of some newsroom constraints. They both said that they had more autonomy when they wrote about race. Wickham said he thought there was a sense that he was not as well versed in topics besides race. He imagined his editors thinking: "I mean, 'What does he know about foreign affairs? What does he know about national politics, presidential politics? Who is he to comment on those kinds of things? He's a race guy.' " But he later mentioned that an editor had not allowed him to write in the voice of a fictional black character because she thought it was racist.

Banks had become more comfortable writing columns about race, especially since *The Los Angeles Times* had fewer black reporters, forcing her to write more about race than she liked. She said that she would like to write about race when she feels personally involved because "I feel like I have something to add to the conversation." However she said that she writes more about race than she would like because *The Los Angeles Times*, which has endured several newsroom cuts in the past decade, has fewer journalists of color. She wished that white journalists, often uncomfortable talking about race, would take more responsibility of covering racialized topics:

> It's not something that's ever present in their lives and they don't necessarily have a vocabulary to talk about it, they don't know what's okay to say, and what's not. … I object to the idea that black stories can only be covered by black columnists, or even by black reporters. I mean, if it's an interesting story, if it's an

> interesting subject, it's interesting. And you know, I write about white things all the time.

Banks said that she wants to write about race on her terms. "What I really object to is having to respond to anything that a black person has done," she said, adding that she has "constant debates" with her editors who think otherwise. She did not write about the recent 10th anniversary of the Simpson murder trial and whether he was guilty of killing his estranged wife. She compared the task to Muslims after 9/11 having to declare the terrorist attacks were wrong. "I'm supposed to make some declaration," she said. "It's a double-edge sword."

Wickham said that from the mid 1980s to 1990s he occasionally wrote columns in the black character of Ungawa Jones, which allowed him to speak "with I would have thought was a black voice that allowed me to invoke sarcasm into my column." He said that he did not need "a lot of black speech but there was some code-switching," the practice of going back and forth in two languages or dialects. When Wickham tried to re-introduce the character in the early 2000s, he said, a white editor said she would not syndicate any of those columns because the character "was racist." Wickham dropped it.

DUALITY

In answering RQ3A — How do black columnists describe their sense, if any, of duality — the interviews revealed that the five columnists embraced the duality of being African American and being a journalist (and other demographics as well). It was seen, if anything, as more of a professional asset than liability. The greater issue that some columnists brought up was the monolithic reaction to them in the newsroom or by

readers; the same misrepresentation they try to counter in their columns they say is applied to them. Here are their individual takes on duality:

DeWayne Wickham (*USA Today*) called himself a "race man" and said the duality of being a journalist who is African American is "the heavy-lifting of journalism." He said that many black journalists shy aware from the commitment, but "most black journalists who see their role as being a *raced man* or *raced woman* inherit that responsibility":

> You can't escape it. You can't get away from it, because once you start down that road, so many people come to you before you can even contemplate an idea. They bring things to you because they see you as someone who has this dual responsibility of being both a journalist and a race person at the same time.

Wickham said that black columnists' insight is "that we see a blind spot that, for the most part, white America would not even acknowledge":

> People will say, 'Why you write about race all the time? My family never owned slaves,' as though somehow having not owned slaves but having had a family that has been in this country for three or four generations, exempts them from having to do something about the ripple effects of slavery.

Eugene Robinson (*Washington Post*) saw being black and being a journalist as "an integrated whole, in my case, at least":

> There are ways in which I am a journalist first and there are ways in which I am black first. But I don't necessarily, or certainly don't often perceive those two things as being in conflict with each other or in opposition or even separate from each other.

Asked whether he felt he had the authority to write about race, he replied: "I mean, yes, I am black and yes, I am a columnist":

> That's the sort of perk: this real estate, the paper, and the website in which to further speak my mind. … I kind of feel like, "Why else am I there?" So in a sense maybe the people do sort of expect to hear what black columnists have to say about certain things, certain events, Trayvon Martin being kind of an obvious one.

But he noted that a 2005 column that got one of his biggest reactions was written during cable television's "obsession" with missing white women with the headline "(Missing) White Women We Love."

Stephen Henderson (*Detroit Free Press*) said that he does not "sit down at the keyboard and then, 'Well, I'm a black man so I've got to think this way or I've got to say this.' " But he stressed that the "pervasive sense of historical and current inequality is not lost on me," especially living in Detroit, "a very good example of a city where the African-American population struggles with very common themes: poverty, lack of education, lack of opportunity." He grew up in a stable black neighborhood in Detroit, attended Jesuit school and the University of Michigan journalism school (where he looked up to fellow student Eugene Robinson) and covered the Supreme Court for *The Baltimore Sun* before joining *The Detroit Free Press* editorial board. These experiences have influenced his "thought processes" as much as being black:

> Being black is part of that – it would be crazy to think that it wouldn't be. But I think it's one of a spectrum of experiences and opportunities that have shaped who I am.

Sandy Banks (*Los Angeles Times*) said that visiting Alabama, where her parents had lived during Jim Crow, "really shaped her" as an African American and journalist.

And as a widowed, working mother of two daughters, she said that she connects to her audience through various channels:

> I like that I can connect to a demographic by age, by race, by mother status, by the fact that I live in the suburbs. There are a lot of demographics that I can reflect and ... and I try to tap into all of those."

Leonard Pitts Jr. (*Miami Herald)* does not see a paradox for black journalists, of struggling between being black and being a journalist:

> I don't spend a lot of time wondering, you know, what my allegiances are, where they lie. … I will say that as a journalist who is black or as a black journalist – however you want to phrase it – one of the things that I decided a long time ago was that it would be criminal if they gave me this megaphone that they give me every week and I did not use it to talk about these things that are right in front of me that I see and that I know. … I am a columnist who is black, and black is one of the things that I know well and so I write about it. It's one of those things that concerns me, so I write about it.

Pitts said he has told budding columnists that "in choosing a column subject to write about, you write about the things that you give a damn about. That's rule No. 1, and [race is] one of the things that I give a damn about because it's fascinating to me, too. I experience it on a daily basis." He pointed to a 1998 column about the death of Roy Rogers to explain how race informs his writing, even about non-racial topics:

> There's a line somewhere in there where it says that after this show came on, I would get out my toy guns and run around and shoot, playing around the housing projects where I lived. And an editor wanted to change that to "neighborhood" or something. But no, I wanted that to be very specific, and it wasn't anything to hit anybody over the head with race. It was just to say that even in the housing projects where we were mostly African-American and Hispanic that we were also part of this fan base for this guy. I guess just trying to be subtle but also to say that we're part of the tapestry of what this country it.

In that vein, Pitts said that he is "always railing against the box" where African Americans writers are placed. He said he liberally quotes Bruce Springsteen lyrics partly because he knows that "people don't expect it and I like messing with their expectations because that's sort of a way of reminding them that boxes are for clothing or for whatever, but boxes are not for people." In fact, two of his columns analyzed in this research used Springsteen lyrics as epigrams: "The first kick I took was when I hit the ground" opened a column about a crying black toddler on a plane who was slapped and called the N-word by a white man *(*2013, February 23); and a year later, "You can get killed just for living in your American skin" after a jury failed to find a white man guilty for killing Jordan Davis, an unarmed black teenager who had been in a SUV playing loud music (2014, February 18).

AUDIENCE AND RACE

In answering RQ4a – How does thinking about their readership influence their writing about race, and vice versa? – the interviews as a whole found that the five columnists make concerted efforts to reach white readers, the majority of the traditional newspaper audience. But they admit the reality is they aim for the narrower set of readers still open to true racial dialogue. The columnists also reserve the right to speak *as* black Americans and *to* black readers. This creates a dynamic of shifting – and even dueling – perspectives and connections between columnist and reader.

Wickham said that one "can hardly get away from that reality" that most of the readers are white:

> So most of your readers are white, but who do you write for? This gets me in trouble. I write for myself. I am the seeker of truth and when I find it, I write it. There's a great unspoken arrogance among journalists, [a deeply] rooted belief that we are better able than others to find the truth and to report it.

Detroit's Stephen Henderson said that he has "to write for everybody in Southeast Michigan." But he said that are times in which he speaks "for a perspective that, that is more heavily, influenced by the fact that I'm African-American than other things. I'm not sure that I ever think about the audience in that kind of fractured way." He said that when he uses first-person plural in his columns:

> Often that is me reflecting an African-American perspective. … Sometimes, it's not. Sometimes it is "we Detroiters," which is different, and that's not just black. That's everybody. But, but there are other times when I'm using we or us, and I'm talking about black people. That can be problematic because I think sometimes some readers don't understand. They don't get the voice change or maybe even agree that I should be doing it, but I actually feel pretty at ease doing that now.

Pitts explained why he often addresses columns to black readers in the form of open letters. For instance, in 2012 he wrote an open letter to African-American young men urging them to emulate basketball players Jeremy Lin's example of shattering stereotypes:

> [W] hen I set it up specifically as an open letter to a given individual, I guess it's with the hope or the expectation that anybody from that group who reads that, is going to feel themselves personally addressed and perhaps even personally put on the spot if need be. With the Jeremy Lin column, I'm not under any illusions that they're going to be bunches of African-American kids reading the papers. … But I hope that, okay, a teacher or a grandparent or somebody at church or something is going to lay this in your path and say, "You need to read this." … I think that there's some value in them seeing themselves specifically addressed in a format where they are not addressed very often.

Robinson, who said that different readers probably had different expectations from his columns, was not sure about the makeup of his audience when he wrote about race but thought it is probably "diverse." He also thought some African American readers expected him to address certain topics, like Trayvon Martin. "I would've written about that anyhow," he said, "but I felt that I have an audience that kind of comes along with me, and that it would be [unfair] not to have something to say about that and find a way to take a pass."

Banks said that sometimes she writes a column to black people, as she did after the Trayvon shooting and Zimmerman trial, telling her editor "this is personal for us. This is for black people." The goal, she said, is to let black people know they have "a voice." Because so much of what she reads does not address "the black situation," she feels justified in writing directly to black people, and has been given more leeway to do so:

> I'll use a phrase or a reference that's of our vernacular. I just take a different tone, and the only questioning I get now is whether something is so specific, readers might not get it. And my answer is then let them look it up and let them find a black person and ask, because I see things in the paper all the time that I don't relate to. I love … and read *The New York Times* all the time, but half of that stuff in there, I don't know what they're talking about because they're talking to rich white people.

Robinson said that he also uses expressions that black people are more likely to understand, even though he has one editor who is unaware of "a lot of expressions that only black readers might get, but also he's nowhere when it comes to popular culture. So I'm accustomed to telling him, you know, 'You just got to trust me on this.' "

Defining Their Role for White Readers

Another element of the columnists' relationship with their readers is how readers perceive them and they perceive their role for white readers. Leonard Pitts Jr. said that he did not want to be thought of representing black America. Repeating what he had written in a column, he said that white readers often "compliment" him by telling him he is "the voice of my people":

> I want to say, you know there's like 38 million of my people – did you check this with them? … I don't like to consider myself or get into the trap of thinking I represent black people because that's not what I do. I think that if you get into that then you sort of are exacerbating the problem.

He also said that he did not want to play "the symbolic Negro" for white America, "where you're sort of standing in for certain readers, for essentially all of black America, particularly everything about black America that they dislike." Pitts said that one of his "favorite" emails read in its entirety: "You're such a racist Nigger":

> You read that and it's like, okay, obviously what I'm doing here is not working at least for this individual that they can write something like this – something that is so ignorant and self-refuting and all these other things. But that individual was not joking. That was his reality.

None of the five columnists thought of themselves as leaders in the black community but were privileged to have a platform to often speak about black America. They were also asked whether they could consider themselves a translator, educator, guide or dialogue coach for white America on racial issues. At first Banks said she would be a dialogue coach then decided: "Actually, the best response I get from readers is when

they say they hadn't thought about it that way. So mind opener, if I were to choose." Her choice was added to the list given to Robinson, Pitts, and Stephenson.

Both Robinson and Wickham saw themselves as educators, with history being an important lesson. Wickham said that it was important to give issues "proper context" to help win over "fair-minded people, who when presented with the historical evidence and the historical contexts, are more willing to accept some of the things that need to be done and, and ought to be done, to improve the quality of life for people who are of color."

Robinson said that history has always been important to him, adding that his family had been "diligent about keeping its history" while he was growing up in the segregated South. "I will not always convince people who may be hostile to my views," he said, "but I do think I can make them aware of things that they weren't aware of before, whether it's historical fact or the fact that there are a lot of people out in the world who have very different perceptions of whatever it is we're talking about and, 'And here's why.' " Pitts confirmed that, as he wrote in one column, he wanted to be a columnist who tries to "persuade minds that can be opened." But he also stressed the importance of educating readers of all races; for instance, he sees the use of the N-word by African Americans as a byproduct of historical ignorance.

Henderson was asked why he should *not* be thought of as a civic leader for Detroiters of all races, because his columns actively direct readers to take such action as ousting leaders and since his 2013 appearance on Comedy Central's *The Colbert Report* to explain why Detroit deserved a bailout:

> I think I might put it differently. I think the role that I play in the dialogue here is as a champion of a very specific voice, and that's sort of the voice of reason over emotion and intellect over other kinds of dynamics. And I do that pretty consistently, and I do it pretty forcefully, and I think me sort of staking out that ground has become a rallying point for other people, who see things the same way or who want to see things the same way, or who want the process to work that way. So I'm not sure that makes you a civic leader. … Leader to me suggests some sort of democratic credibility, which I think is real dangerous when newspapers think they have that. … I'm not elected to anything but I do think I've staked out that space and that people look to me to define that space and to define the issues in our community through that space.

Importance of History

The five columnists confirmed the importance of relying on history in writing about race, a constant found in textual analyses of their work, especially in their use of the historical black narrative. Citing American history – especially that of black America and the Constitution – is a device they employ in trying to reach whom *USA Today's* Wickham described as the "fair-minded" and "rational" reader of all races.

To Wickham, "nothing has shaped America more over the last couple of centuries than the most mistreatment and the emancipation and the aspiration of black folks":

> [W]e talk about diversity broadly but virtually all the great social game is taking place in the United States since its creation that comes about as a result of the agitation and the aspiration and the protests and the struggles of black people for equality of opportunity.

Pitts contended that "if you don't understand the history of anything and particularly if you don't understand the history of race, then you can't understand" how racism operates in America." He likened it to thinking: "There's not slavery and you can go in the front door of a McDonald's. What's your problem?" He said that the successes

of and slights directed at President Obama, who had to produce his birth certificate, and Oprah Winfrey, once followed by security while shopping, "don't invalidate the thesis, they validate the thesis":

> And people really have difficulty with that concept. We are an ahistorical people in a lot of ways. We really don't want to accept that what happened in the past has any impact on what's happening now, particularly if what happened in the past is something that we find embarrassing or something that makes us feel bad, then we really don't want to deal with it.

Pitts often writes about a historic Truth (which he capitalizes) about black America that he seeks to bring to light. He said that he capitalizes truth to distinguish it from facts:

> To me, "fact" is one thing but "truth" is another. If you have enough facts, maybe it leads you to truth. The truth is sort of in my formulation. Truth is the kind of thing that Dr. King said: "Truth crushed to earth will rise again" or "A man can't ride your back unless it's bent." … I think that many of the truths of the African-American experience are things that we as Americans and again White Americans prefer to ignore. Sometimes African Americans too want to … ignore a lot of the larger truths of African American history. There are lessons there in our history, in African-American history that are pretty plain. They're as obvious as neon but we choose often times not to see them because if we see them, then they're going to bring us pain and we want to, at all costs, avoid pain.

Robinson said he mentions history regularly because increasingly younger readers of all colors also need to be reminded of history's role in shaping today's America. Banks, whose parents grew up in the segregated South, noted that, "Part of what I think is a loss to my kids is that they've not connected to the struggle of my parents."

They confirmed that they promote the belief in constitutional ideals – while noting how often America falls short of these ideals – has been a key tool in writing, and educating readers, about race. Henderson, the former Supreme Court reporter, explained:

> I think the one constant in American history and progress has been the allegiance to the idea of a Constitutional Republic, which is a very different concept of a country than you have pretty much anywhere else on the planet. And that, to me, is the promise. It's the singular promise that was made not just to white Americans or to wealthy Americans. That was made to all Americans, and as an African-American, I think forcing the issues that we have as a community through the lens of Constitutional promise is probably the most likely way we get to solutions.

He wants those solutions to trickle down to Detroit. Henderson then touched on the black responsibility frame that the columnists used in writing about race. While marveling that "if you really sit back and think about the fact that you have an African-American president in a country that 150 years ago fought an incredibly bloody war over the mere question of black humanity," he noted that "it's frustrating though that in cities like Detroit, we appear to have taken tremendous steps backward":

> That's what bothers me is 40 years ago a black kid in Detroit had more opportunity than he or she does today, and that's what I find just completely unacceptable. We can fix that. I know we can fix that.

STATE OF RACIAL DISCOURSE

Regarding RQ4b —How do black columnists discuss racial discourse, and their role in shaping it, in their own words? — the interviews revealed that the columnists perceived racial discourse was seen as deteriorating and damaged. The corrosive state of racial discourse has had an impact on their writing about race. Robinson said that discourse had "definitely" changed the last couple of decades, with the biggest change being a wide acceptance of white victimhood. While he said it was not new, "it seems to have a whole different tone these days":

> The whole thing is, if you raise the issue of race in any context, which I do, immediately it becomes, "You're playing the race card." Or, "you called me a racist," and even if one was careful not to call anybody an anything. Just the fact that you raised race or set an example as race as a factor in the way President Obama has been treated. It immediately became, "You play the race card," "You called me a racist," and then that ends a discussion about the point that was being the question that was raised — that the problem becomes an argument about who called who a racist and what is playing the race card.

Sandy Banks said that overall racial discourse had evolved because of President Obama, putting racial conversation on the national and international stage. She said Obama's election had allowed "some people to believe everything's fine, allowed other people to get really angry at where we've gone. It's made that conversation more necessary, so I have to write about it more." The corrosive nature of racial dialogue, often fueled by the Internet and anonymity, has made her feel "less good about it and less comfortable." She added, "I have to force myself, often, to take on issues that I know are going to get a lot of ugly and hurtful blowback."

Pitts said the conversation about race "has always been in my experience uninformed or misinformed on the part of a large portion of the population. That hasn't really changed." But he added: "It seems to be getting a lot coarser now." What surprised him is how the web "liberated a lot of people to really unburden themselves of some opinions and expressions that they would not have dared to put out, say back in the 1990s before the Internet was widely used":

> It's fascinating to me the kind of stuff that people will say now. It used to be when I started you'd get occasional hateful letters but they were anonymous. I noticed sometime around the late '90s that people started to sign their names. Now with email being so ubiquitous, people will just say the most amazing things to you and have names and phone numbers attached. … I guess the point

> I'm trying to make is there was once a time when people at least were still ashamed of having these really bad racial attitudes. In my experience they are becoming less and less ashamed these days.

The columnists said they are in a constant fight against racial discourse's mass misrepresentation of African Americans — called invisibility, a faux monolithic black America, or dehumanization. Henderson stressed that "once you dehumanize somebody, then anything becomes possible or justifiable":

> And that's what we see in, in a case like Trayvon – that people who supported Zimmerman for the most part did not see in this teenager any reflection of themselves or of their own kids. They saw [Martin] as some sort of predator or animal, and, we've done that in this country over the last 20 or 30 years to an extent that scares me, you know. My kid, because of the way he looks, could fall very easily into that category in someone's mind, and then it's nothing in their minds to do all kinds of things that you wouldn't do to another human being. That's extremely frightening.

Asked how he maintained the energy to keep addressing racial topics, Pitts replied:

> Well, to tell you the God's honest truth, sometimes you don't. Sometimes it just takes you down because you have the sense of banging your head against a brick wall. So there are times when I will take a mental-health sabbatical. Matter of fact, I'm in one right now where you're not writing about race.

Pitts and his assistant (who receives the emails) were taking "a break from all of the misunderstandings, the ignorance and the foolishness that comes when you're talking about race":

> I'm an African-American man so it's not abstract to me. I always tell people I write about race for two reasons: one because it's fascinating. The whole idea that someone can think they are superior to someone else because of the paint job they happened to get when they were born. But the other reason is the obvious reason: it's personal. You know this is something that has an impact upon my life and upon the lives of my children. When you write this stuff and you put your heart into it and you're trying with all your might to explain something that really needs explaining and to get people an education on something that they clearly

> don't understand and you get back some ignorant or idiotic letter or email from somebody who really didn't get it, yeah, it takes something out of you. It really does. It is not fun.

Banks also said that such feedback becomes personal. The columnist, who also discussed vile reader comments on her columns, said that she tries to rationalize that it is only "small percentage of people who are just talking very loud and calling you names and 'You're a monkey' and 'You people are this and that's why we hate you." But she said it is "demoralizing to read it over and over and over and over again," affecting her not only as a journalist but also as an African American:

> Is there just some really small group of people that have an outside voice, or is this really the way a lot of people feel? Is [it] the guy in the elevator next to you? There's a wariness that I have, that I don't like, that comes from reading all these emails and things.

The interviews revealed columnists are aware of their role in trying to shape the country's conversation about race. Newsroom autonomy was not an issue, even though two columnists, Wickham and Banks, had less than Pitts, Robinson, and Henderson. The columnists did not see duality as a burden. Although they did not consider themselves leaders, they saw themselves trying to lead the effort to repair racial discourse by educating white readers through history and their reverence for Constitutional ideals. They also wanted to shape those minds that still remain open for dialogue. But there is a sense that racial dialogue is so damaged that many whites who contact them through forums, emails, and other correspondence are irreparably set in their ways.

Chapter 9: Discussion and Conclusion

This research analyzed more than 3,000 newspaper and online columns to determine the role that elite black columnists play in shaping racial discourse in the United States, to examine racial discourse from the perspective of a powerful "them," rather than the white mainstream "us." The 11 African-American columnists who were examined —seven Pulitzer Prize winners in the commentary division, four writing for publications with the largest circulations —already exerted influence because of their stature and widespread presence. In answering RQ1 —What do black columnists write about – the findings showed that they wrote authoritatively on a range of issues, from global terrorism to national and city politics. There were columns in which the reader might not guess the color of the writer if it were not for the portrait that accompanies the columnist in print and online.

But the analysis found that these columnists frequently wrote about race and did so in ways that were noteworthy and quite similar. It found that the answer to RQ2 – Collectively, how do elite black columnists write about race – was significant: their blackness was more than skin deep and indeed shaped their commentary. Their being black was the reason these columnists wrote about race; being black impacted *how* they wrote about race. They wrote from the perspective of black America, embodied its historical narrative with their personal stories, and fought for its unachieved rights. They emphatically embraced their color and their heritage and did not hide their anger and frustration over continuing racial injustices, whether framed in liberal or conservative

perspectives. They used their prominence to speak from a point of view that often counters mainstream thinking and opinion, like their dismissal of the King holiday and Black History Month. E. R. Shipp of *The New York Daily News* was speaking for the majority of the columnists when she wrote:

> This is one of those times of the year when I dread the rituals: the season that opens with celebrations of Martin Luther King Jr. as "The Dreamer." It ends in another six weeks with often equally superficial rhapsodies about the greatness of we kings and queens of Africa who came to America in chains -- Black History Month. (2001, January 15)

After the September 11 terrorists attacks, they insisted that civil rights are guaranteed to all, including the foreign-born accused of terrorism and the American poor without driver's licenses who were threatened by voter ID laws and. They injected themselves into what Robinson and Pitts called "the third rail" of America's racial conscious. They insisted that the mainstream media pay attention to black-on-black crime but criticized coverage and misrepresentation that tainted all blacks as criminals. They spoke directly to black readers to celebrate, to commiserate, to scold, and to sound alarm. Pitts told African Americans that they needed "to wake the hell up" in the wake of the non guilty verdict for George Zimmerman, who killed unarmed Trayvon Martin (2013, July 16).

Crucially, in answering RQ2a – How does race inform their approach to the news? – the research found that for these columnists, no story about African-Americans existed in a vacuum. They relied on a centuries-old black narrative, a sense of black self that uniquely binds African Americans. To construct this narrative, columnists

summoned history, which was told relentlessly and emphatically. The narrative included slave ships, lynchings, and the Jim Crow South. It also suggested nostalgia for a black America that was self-reliant and proud in the face of overt, institutional oppression. The columnists articulated the history and the collective memory of the black America struggle that inhabits the narrative.

In answering RQ2a, the research also found that the columnists used their own lives to embody the highs and lows of black America – of succeeding despite Jim Crow, of worrying about their sons whose lives they saw further diminished by Trayvon's killing and Zimmerman's acquittal.

Their commentary illustrated that being black is not the same as being liberal. Their personal stories mirrored those of most African American baby boomers: liberal, Christian, and with Southern roots. They worked to show that blacks have more in common with conservative ideas than mainstream media portrayed; their distaste for rap was discernable. They expressed their love for America and were offended when black patriotism was questioned.

They wrote that black Americans had progressed – even rapidly, citing the election of Barack Obama. Yet the columnists refused to let the election of the first black president let America off the hook, as Tucker wrote after the 2008 election: "An Obama presidency does not herald the end of racism in America. Obama isn't 'post-racial.' He isn't the messiah whose coming ends bigotry and inequality for all time. He'll just be the

president" (2008, November 5). They saw it as their duty to remind white America that injustice still had to be battled. Stephen Henderson of *The Detroit Free Press* noted:

> Yes, things are immeasurably different in America today than they were 150 years ago. But "unfulfilled" is still the right word to describe much of the American promise.
>
> Race and racism still determine far too much on a macro level in this country, and they continue to rear their heads in specific, troubling instances all the time. (2013, November 19).

Another major finding of this research was the answer to RQ2b: Which themes or frames emerge in columns about race? The research identified complementary frames that the columnists used to provide meaning to race-related events, "weaving a connection among them" as Gamson and Modigliani had suggested (1987, p. 143). The frames were consistent whether the columnist was national or local, conservative or liberal, a Pulitzer Prize winner or not. Three frames described the diminishment of black America, and three offered keys toward black progress. The frames of the devaluation of black life and misrepresentation presented African Americans as a "problem people," even if the columnists did not want to do so. But enlisting historic and biographical details, these frames were used to show how a scholar as prestigious as Harvard's Henry Louis Gates could be arrested at his front door and how a 17-year-old unarmed black teenager could be stalked and shot while his killer was barely questioned by the police initially and ultimately was found not guilty. These frames also cast affirmative action as a corrective that the columnists wrote (reluctantly) was still necessary:

> The saddest thing is that the argument about race-conscious policies has eclipsed one of the central tenets of the whole idea: that affirmative action was a

> temporary fix, intended to create opportunity in the breach between the achievement of legal equality and de facto equality (Henderson, 2014, April 24).

Two frames centered on the national conversation – or lack thereof – on race. The destructive racial discourse frame sought to make clear that discourse itself – including the news media and even their celebration of holidays – were complicit in the devaluation of black life and, obviously, misrepresentation. The columnists insisted that George Zimmerman had been primed to see Trayvon as being "up to no good" before he shot him. Yet *The Wall Street Journal's* Jason L. Riley wrote that black statistics on crime justified such thinking – statistics that other columnists cited in worrying about black-on-black crime, a far greater danger to the black community than police brutality or rogue neighborhood watchmen. Instead of lifting the national conversation about race, as columnists had hoped after his "More Perfect Union" speech during his 2008 campaign, President Obama instead inspired vitriol that was directed not just at him but black America in general. But the columnists also were dismayed by African Americans who continued to use the N-word, noting its destructive mark on young black men.

The fourth frame was a corrective to destructive discourse: their commitment to raising critical race consciousness, including a strategic unmasking of whiteness – elevating white privilege and white domination to national dialogue. This frame is an engagement of racial formation theory's racial projects, the strategic use of critical racial consciousness (Omi & Winant, 2014). In the age of Obama, white voters were no longer just "voters." But these columnists used this frame before Obama rose to national prominence, with columns criticizing cable's fascination with missing white women and

efforts to debunk the white assumptions about race after the Katrina devastation. The constant references to the Republican Party's Southern Strategy – a 1960s-era campaign ploy in which race-baiting steered Southern whites toward the party and away from the Democrats – were used to show that white conservatism might not be new in the South, but the GOP's courtship of it had been. They rejected the discourse that linked "the party of Lincoln" to today's GOP.

The last two frames, black responsibility and reverence for the Constitution and American ideals, were templates for improving Black America. The Constitution is revered for its historic role in the black quest for equality. Black journalists were as protective of the First Amendment as white journalists and made numerous references to their right and rights of others to speak their mind. The columnists sought American ideals, as promised by the Constitution and illustrated by Obama's election. As Stephen Henderson said during his in-depth interview:

> I think the one constant in American history and progress has been the allegiance to the idea of a Constitutional Republic, which is a very different concept of a country than you have pretty much anywhere else on the planet. And that, to me, is the promise. It's the singular promise that was made not just to white Americans or to wealthy Americans.

The columnists kept asking for African Americans to be given their fair share – and most important, to do something with it. The frame of black responsibility, crucially, is directed at the black community: to do something about shortcomings that cannot be solely blamed on systemic racism. The columnists cited comedian Bill Cosby's mantra of self-reliance, which included critiques of the underclass and rap/thug culture. Some

columnists expressed nostalgia for the days of the segregated yet active communities of their youth, especially in terms of how they regarded their young. Colbert I. King of *The Washington Post* often used the nostalgia frame in commenting on the dangers for black children who had not benefited from integration. He compared his childhood to those of four murdered children in the District of Columbia, whose deaths had gone unnoticed for months:

> My neighborhood didn't have any Taj Mahals, but kids living there had something to eat, a place to sleep and people who knew they existed.
>
> A child had value. When one died, people for blocks around mourned.
>
> A child dropping out of sight and not being missed was next to impossible. Not today.
>
> At a time when many in the community are focused on the possibility of America electing its first black president, when so many eyes are on Barack Obama, following his every move, it's even more sad that some black children have become isolated, forgotten by the rest of the world, unseen and uncared for. (2008, October 4).

In answering the research questions centering on their assessment of racial discourse in their own words, the five interviewed columnists acknowledged that whites probably made up the majority of their readership – and most of their columns were directed to them – but were conscious of a black audience, to whom they often wrote directly.

Newkirk (2000) had contended that black journalists had to devise strategies to offer stories on blacks that "conform to the interests, desires, and tastes of a white audience," and those who tried to counter preconceived notions often became outcasts in their own newsrooms (p. 10). These were not concerns for the interviewed columnists. In fact, a major finding is their relative lack of newsroom anxiety in terms of writing about

race. Banks wished that she did not have to write as much about race, but the other columnists embraced the opportunity to do so.

In spite of their high profiles, they refused to see themselves as leaders in any sense. They saw themselves as educating their white and black readers. This task had become more difficult as racial discourse increasingly deteriorated in the age of the Internet and a black president. Still, they hoped to reach those readers – no matter how few – still willing to have an open mind. There was a cost for such work. The *Miami Herald's* Leonard Pitts Jr. and *The Los Angeles Times'* Sandy Banks both expressed the personal toll that writing about race had exacted of them.

But the interviews and the analysis of their columns as a whole show that elite black columnists are indeed an elite group within structured communication empowered to tell the mainstream "us" about "them" – by being an elite one of "them." They crafted today's black America in the image of its troubled past, still seeking, as Du Bois first put it, "the end of his striving: to be a co-worker in the kingdom of culture." Or to put it another way, to redefine "us."

CONTRIBUTIONS TO LITERATURE AND THEORY

This study makes several contributions to the field of communication. In terms of media sociology, this study marks the first extensive analysis of black columnists, elite or otherwise, in which their work is the sole focus. The achieved goal was to compare black columnists in their own right, and not as one variable (e.g., Gavin, 2007; McElroy, in press). White America remains present in this study as makers of news and in the form of

audience and reader reaction, but the research offers a concentrated analysis of how one racial group voices its experiences to another.

The research found that race indeed played a prominent role in the Pulitzer Prize-winning entries, signaling the news media's interest in keeping race in the news. In all but one case, Stephen Henderson's 2013 entry, most columns were explicitly about race or alluded to the black American experience, like urban violence. However, many of the racial stories told in the Pulitzer entries presented blacks as "problem people." Because the columnists' point of view was decidedly black and personal, a cynic could claim these Pulitzers indicate an industry preference for blacks to paint themselves as pathological. But the interviews with five columnists confirmed something sensed in the textual analysis of the work of all 11 journalists: they could be said to have enlisted, rather than been recruited, to write about race. They were active fighters in the battle against racism and, crucially, racist discourse.

In another contribution to media sociology, this study revealed the profound significance of biography in expressing the black American experience. While Sandy Banks' column in *The Los Angeles Times* was designed to be personal, E. R. Shipp of *The New York Daily News* and Cynthia Tucker of *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, the two other women analyzed in this collection, wrote as frequently about being black as the male columnists and rarely wrote about being female. To these elite columnists, race was more relevant than gender. Thus a major finding of this research is that African-American columnists not only wrote about race far more frequently than female columnists wrote

about women's issues, but also they heavily relied on personal stories and biographies as credible evidence of the black American experience, which women columnists rarely did (Harp, Bachmann & Locke, 2014). The lives of black columnists and those of their families served as credibility in their work. They had experienced Jim Crow; their parents had fought in World War II and Korea only to be denied freedoms back home.

While Newkirk (2001) and Wilson (1991) had identified a struggle and paradox for black journalists in the newsroom – having to choose between being blacks who are journalists, or journalists who are black – these elite columnists were mostly free of such concerns. It is telling that the five black columnists interviewed saw little constraint on their work, as would be expected of white columnists of equal stature. In fact, two journalists said that they had more leeway when writing about race.

The sense of double consciousness was not a media sociological issue for these black columnists – the newsroom paradox was nonexistent. But they said in interviews and they wrote in their columns that the concept remained relevant to the everyday lives of all African Americans, including theirs. After President Obama reacted to the Zimmerman verdict, saying that he too had been racially profiled, *The New York Times'* Charles M. Blow cited the Du Bois' "peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness." He explained that it was "in these subtleties that black folks are forever forced to box with shadows, forever forced to recognize their otherness and their inability to simply blend":

> Surely, much has changed in America since Du Bois wrote those lines more than a century ago — namely, bias tends to be expressed structurally rather than on an individual level — but the "two-ness" remains. The reality of being

> marked, denied and diminished for being America's darker sons persists, even for a man who rose to become one of America's brightest lights. (2013, July 20).

These findings were consistent with those of Campbell and Wiggins (2014), who found that three elite black columnists, Robinson, Tucker, and Pitts, framed duality in ways that mirrored Barack Obama's 2008 presidential campaign. But this study enriches framing research by finding that the elite black columnists had embraced the race matters/does not matter perspective before Obama's rise, and that the contradictory perspective represented their longstanding worldview. In fact, in examining columns over a fifteen-year period that included highs and lows of the black American experience, this study identified six frames reliably used by elite black columnists: the devaluation of black life, misrepresentation, destructive racial discourse, raising critical race consciousness (and unmasking whiteness), black responsibility and black pride, and reverence for constitutional rights and American ideals.

Because this research engaged double-consciousness as a theoretical framework, the analysis found that the black columnists approached race in ways that were structurally and stylistically similar to Du Bois' *The Souls of Black Folk* at the turn of the last century and still employed by writers of the black experience (Johnson, 2008). Like Du Bois' chapters, these columns centered on history and autobiography; they are observational and critical. The columnists were dismayed by black nihilism but saw the faults of black America rooted in its horrific past. They praised black America's unique spirituality and strength and held out for the promise of its future. And while the columnists suffered or nearly suffered personal loss because of inequalities of race, they,

like Du Bois, emerged to tell the stories of folk whose lives are, for the most part, dissimilar from theirs.

In this vein, the results of this dissertation contribute to research in race and racial discourse. The findings identify a link between the Omi and Winant (2014) concept of racial projects and the work of these elite black columnists. These journalists are NOT being accused of colluding to push a pro-black agenda in the news media; rather, independently of each other, the columnists reacted to existing racist projects – the rhetoric of color-blindness, the equation of blackness with criminality, etc. – with *anti-racist* work. With direct access to white America, they aimed to articulate an alternative perspective on race in America. The scenes from New Orleans were not of black Americans, but of poor, less educated, immobile black Americans. Trayvon Martin was not just one black teenager. He could have been columnist Charles M. Blow in college; he could be the sons of Blow, Page, and Henderson. Even the columns by the conservative Jason C. Riley could be read as a racial project to counter liberal lock on black support.

In their loose-knit racial project, as it were, the columnists relied on the black narrative that put contemporary issues in a historical context. Because racism still exists against African Americans, the story of black America's striving for equality continues; columns referenced the past to make sense of today. An understanding of 14-year-old Emmett Till's murder in Mississippi in 1955 helped explain the killings of unarmed Trayvon Martin and Jordan Davis and the evolution of state-endorsed policies that harm

blacks. There was a repetition of themes – aftereffects of slavery, the Southern strategy, the use of the N-word – as the columnists attempted to link events into a narrative, with the goal of breaking the chain of such injustices as misrepresentation, inequality, destructive discourse, conservative anti-poor policies, et al. Their commentary – and the frame use – about Harvard scholar Henry Louis Gates' arrest in 2009 would be all but repeated after the Trayvon killing in 2012. In this way, the black columnists are fulfilling Walter Lippmann's goal of column-writing: keeping contemporary events in such perspective that readers "will have no reason to be surprised when something of importance occurs" (Rivers, 1967, p. 59).

The issue, of course, is whether white America is listening. The columnists made the case that America's refusal to remember its past had condemned blacks to repeatedly suffer the consequences. As Sandy Banks of *The Los Angeles Times* remarked after Zimmerman's not guilty verdict:

> This seems like history being replayed, progress erased. It calls to mind my parents' stories of life in the South, when black safety depended on white goodwill and submission kept you in the authorities' good graces.
>
> "Don't forget to set your clock back 50 years before you go to bed tonight," one friend wrote on his Facebook page the day the verdict was announced.
>
> That's the way I feel today. (2013, July 15).

IMPLICATIONS OF A BLACK NARRATIVE WITHIN JOURNALISM

The black narrative is one of struggle and of striving to overcome. The "striving" narrative is personal for these columnists, most of whom grew up in the segregated South or had parents who had fled Jim Crow. So this narrative is not just a collective memory

passed on to a generation; it is enriched with their own stories. Thus, the narrative reflects a particular generational and geographical perspective of black America – and America, too. Currently, this perspective is meaningful for the shrinking newspaper audience, in which more than two-thirds of the readership is older than 35 years old and a little more a third are at least 55 years old (Newspaper Association of America, 2013). One could argue that such personal strands of the narrative would not be available to future generations of African-Americans. That would be the ultimate goal of the narrative: the end of striving and finally achieving. But these columnists could argue, as they did with the Trayvon story, that ignoring the past had not served America, or Black America, well. As *The New York Times'* Charles M. Blow pointed out, every generation has its Emmett Till or Trayvon Martin (2013, December 18).

Still, such a worldview is problematic in terms of journalism, where deviance from the norm and conflict are favorable attributes for coverage (Shoemaker, et al., 1987). Whether about race or Mother Nature, news is usually bad news. By their own admission, African American columnists wrote that black-on-black crime is not news; their commenting on it elevated it to newsworthiness. While *The Washington Post's* Colbert I. King effectively goaded District of Columbia officials to solve specific murders and account for incompetence that cost the lives of the "underclass," few columnists of any color (and their patient editors) have such resolve.

Ultimately, there is a journalistic consequence for relying on a black narrative. Charles Johnson (2008), the noted scholar and writer, contends that the

conflict of the black narrative is slavery, then segregation and legal disenfranchisement; the meaning of the black narrative is victimhood (p. 32). If both were true, then the presence of the black narrative in the work of elite African American columnists further reinforces the representation of black Americans as "problem people." This is a charge that most of these black columnists rejected from readers, and understandably so. However there is no denying that if history of black America informs today's black American experience, that history is marked by terror, oppression, and contempt. As some vocal readers pointed out to black columnists, such a framework made for a depressing or at least Sisyphean state of affairs and state of discourse.

The reader was often faced with two negatives – the news event and its deleterious historical precedent. The "problem people" portrayal of black America is almost inevitable, even if the larger point is that white America *was* and *is* the real issue. Trayvon and the people stranded in the Superdome are "problems" even before destructive discourse – in the form of hateful emails and partisan talk shows – chime in to put the debate as much in the spotlight as the event. Faulty discourse, like the narrative, outlives the news cycle.

Johnson (2008) also contends that the narrative also has its blind spots as it frames black American history. The columnists' conceptualization of the narrative paid heed to the classic Civil Rights Movement of the mid-1950's through mid-1960s. Not surprisingly, their reliance on that time frame aligns with journalism's reverence for the era, when mainstream news media valued non-violence and martyrdom over other

attributes in the freedom struggle, like self-defense (Rhodes, 2007; Bond, 2001; Baker, 1994). Black responsibility, as prescribed by Bill Cosby and writer Tavis Smiley and favored by the columnists, is a far cry from the black nationalism, whose chief representative in these columns was the anti-Semite Louis Farrakhan. A real engagement of Black Power, unlike Martin Luther King Jr., is missing from today's news media; these black columnists were no exception.

Perhaps the narrative complicates the task of black columnists, who already faced an uphill battle. Like the black life itself, the narrative is contradictory, confusing and, perhaps makes the best sense to those living in its skin. Pride in the strong, segregated community that nurtured its young is nostalgically recalled; Jim Crow is forever despicable. The columnists proved with repeated examples that America has never been colorblind, but the counterargument remains that was America then and not now.

But this analysis ultimately finds the black narrative a valid theoretical framework for explaining how black columnists provide context about the black American experience, as it remains a sufficient tool for them to deploy – as long as it is understood that their engagement of the narrative is more than just looking back. Similar to narrative identity, which psychological studies apply to a single self (McAdams, 2010), the columnists took the past, applied to the present and used the remix to adapt the narrative.

While future generations of black columnists might turn to other methods for writing about race, the current use of black narrative ultimately made journalistic sense as a device for not only discussing race but also providing context. It is historical and

personal and fulfilled the columnist mission making sense of the world. Perhaps the world has to change before the narrative can be abandoned.

LIMITATIONS OF RESEARCH

This study is a comprehensive examination of elite black columnists at mainstream publications. Although it is comprehensive, it does acknowledge some limitations. By focusing on elite black columnists, this research makes no attempt to compare their work to those of columnists of other color or in less prestigious settings. Its findings that elite black columnists face little newsroom constraint, which contradicts earlier research and anecdotal literature on black columnists and black journalists in general, cannot be applied to other African-American journalists.

In addition, this study sought only those elite black columnists who are based in newsrooms. Such prominent black conservative columnists as Thomas Sowell and Walter Williams operate outside traditional newsrooms; therefore, no assumptions can be made about their work. Nor did this study examine black columnists whose work appears solely in ethnic print or online publications, where most of their readership is assumed to be African American.

In terms of methodology, one limitation is the few number of in-depth interviews, falling short of McCracken's (1988) suggestion of eight to ten respondents (though this research continues to pursue the other columnists who had agreed to participate). However for elite interviewing, the five elite black columnists represented almost 50 percent of those who were analyzed and were more than sufficient for gathering

significant findings. This research is satisfied in securing a range from the five participants: one woman, three Pulitzer Prize winners, two local columnists, and three national columnists.

In addition, this research did not seek the voices of two other key components in the production and consumption of news: newsroom managers and the readers of these columnists. This research purposely did not engage in a quantitative content analysis; one column strategically published may be as valuable as ten columns appearing elsewhere.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

The findings of this study plant the seed for future research that improves an understanding of the intersection of race and the news media. Racial formation theory, like critical race theory, is gingerly applied here and rarely fully developed in communication research even though scholars in that field often theorize about media and race. Decades of research have proved that the news media are a cultural tool in dominant ideology (see Hall et al., 1978; van Dijk, 1991; Ferguson, 1998; Gandy, 1998). As such, examinations of race and media might be better served by looking beyond traditional communication theories, which often focus on the mechanics of production of news content without a broader cultural implication. Analyzing news coverage and news in general as racial projects does not necessarily suggest bias or planned agendas; instead, it offers a way to identify strategic cultural and ideological patterns beyond content itself.

The identification of six racialized frames that the columnists regularly employed in their work indicates that such framing might appear in traditional, "objective" news

texts, though not as overtly. These frames should be tested in the work of black and white journalists, and in the ethnic and mainstream press.

There are many recommendations in the field of media sociology, which examines the elements involved the construction of news. First, as this study illustrates, biography is a powerful tool especially when explaining the news of the day. More research should explore biography's role in the content of columnists and feature writers, regardless of race, gender or specialization.

Another line of research involves the role columnists play in breaking news for their publications. Charles M. Blow wrote the first piece on Trayvon Martin for *The New York Times*; cursory evidence suggests other black columnists did the same with similar race-centered stories for their publications. The way news filters up, especially in the age of social media, is explored through the concept called diffusion of news (Anderson, 2010). More research is needed on the role of black journalists, presumably more in touch with people of color, play in bringing race-related stories to the attention of mainstream media.

In addition, many of these black columnists were also on the editorial boards of their publications, suggesting another level of autonomy. Further research, through content analysis and/or survey and interviews, could determine whether columnists on editorial boards have more freedom over their work than those who are not appointed to top leadership positions at their publications.

In the gathering of content for this research, it became apparent that syndicated columns are somewhat at the mercy of the publications that run them. Leonard Pitts Jr. is originally published in *The Miami Herald*, but his column appears in publications across the country and around the world. While the syndicator enforces limitations on length and editing, it was clear that some headlines for a column were better than others, and some publications trimmed the columns more than others. In addition, many of the syndicated column headlines were labeled as "Left," indicating to the reader how to perceive the piece before actually reading it. Incidentally, a word of warning to all researchers regardless of method: publications' attempts to monetize content have resulted in less access to their content. Some publications like *The Detroit Free Press* charge for archival work and are increasingly difficult to find through traditional university-level databases. The researcher analyzing content without using primary sources – for example, finding Leonard Pitts Jr. columns without relying on *The Miami Herald*, which does not appear in LexisNexis – must be mindful of the time delay and edits of syndicated columns. The recommendation is for more research on syndicated columns, and how editing, headline writing, and labeling compare with the original column.

Also in terms of methodology, the research has re-emphasized the importance of qualitative analysis of columns as a way to "read" the broader messages of such work. Even though some frames were often manifest in columns, some, like the many expressions of black responsibility, were not. In this vein, the researcher's perspective did help bring knowledge and an understanding of not only the language used in the columns

and in the interviews but also the history and context used in both. In addition, the research discovered the use of the black narrative after several readings of columns and after the interviews were conducted; building theory through qualitative methods requires time, patience, and a willingness to incorporate traditional and nontraditional concepts.

Another research recommendation is a continued push to reach out to journalists to let them tell about their profession and newswork in their own words. Although the study was not able to interview all of the analyzed columnists, there is much to be gained by relying on more than content analysis alone. The bravado that Leonard Pitts Jr. maintained for his columns was countered by his admission that he often needed to take breaks from writing about race – revealing the human, if not the journalistic, toll of writing about race.

Unlike the textbook guides that often interview noted columnists, much scholarly research on column writing leaves the columnist outside the process. But the attempt to include their point of view and subjectivity is not one of fairness, but of completeness. Again, researchers conducting interviews with respondents in the same cultural group should be mindful but not hesitant to take advantage of such affinity for the sake of accuracy and depth.

The last, and perhaps most important recommendation, is research on reader reaction to black columnists. All 11 who were analyzed in this study each wrote a column or mentioned reader reaction – overwhelmingly unfavorable – to their work. Although one research experiment showed that readers would be receptive to black or white

columnists (Andsager & Mastin, 2007), more field work is needed to examine the other side of the conversation between black columnists and readers, black and white. This researcher knows from professional experience that online comments and emails represent a smattering of readership. These elite black columnists had two-way conversations about race and reacted strongly to those who made an effort, no matter how vile, to communicate with them. It is worth investigating who is actually listening and engaging in their work.

IMPLICATIONS FOR JOURNALISM

This research has illustrated the crucial role black columnists play in disseminating information about race and giving it historical and personal context that traditional news stories would not provide. They not only wrote about race in the news but also injected race into coverage where it might seem unexpected — the September 11 terrorist attacks and the July Fourth holiday, the deaths of Gregory Peck and Johnny Cash. They often were the voice of the voiceless, writing about people whose deaths might have gone unnoticed had the columnists not taking up their cause. In doing so, they are the robust, mainstream legacy of the Black Press, writing from a black perspective and often about black causes. They are skeptical of black and white leaders, use barbershops and beauty shops, go to church, and give their children "the talk" about dealing with police. The crucial difference with the Black Press is that most of their readers are white.

Although Keith Gilyard (2014), a scholar in race and rhetoric, commented that most mainstream black columnists were more Rodney King than Martin Luther King – writing that we all just try to get along rather than pushing for radical change – these findings contradict his offhanded remark. Nor do they exactly mirror Delilah Beasley, the first black female columnist for a white newspaper, who almost ninety years ago said that the aim of *Oakland Tribune's* "Activities Among Negroes" was "to elevate blacks in the eyes of whites, to promote interracial understanding and to build white support for black social justice" (Wagner, 2009, p. 83). Those issues remain on the agenda in American race relations, but almost a hundred years later, elite black columnists could be more forthcoming to white readers. As *The New York Daily News'* E. R. Shipp bluntly wrote: "The world — the one that does not consist of black folks — needed to see King beaten like a dog by a gaggle of Los Angles cops in March 1991" (2002, May 1).

Within the constraints of mainstream news media — and its capitalist paradigm — they did push the envelope in their articulation of race. Judging by reader response alone, if indeed they are "paid by white people to disturb white people's peace," as one columnist once put it, they are doing their job quite successfully.

But other than the Pulitzer juries, is white America really listening? Elite black columnists are a force in racial discourse, making sure a distinct black perspective is voiced in mainstream news. But their effort to dislodge racist discourse or make America own up to its shameful past is a formidable task.

And despite the wide appeal of such syndicated columnists as Clarence Page and Leonard Pitts Jr., the number of black columnists is dwindling amid shrinking print-based newsrooms, especially at midsized newspapers. The loss of ten prominent black columnists in 2011 — through layoffs, career changes, or retirement — was "part of a depressing trend" (Prince, 2011). That year, Cynthia Tucker, who had won a 2007 Pulitzer for commentary, quit in Atlanta, and Bob Herbert, perhaps the most high-profile black columnist at a mainstream newspaper, left *The New York Times*. Charles M. Blow, whose work was analyzed here, replaced Herbert. While there seems to be no immediate danger for the prominent African American voice at the largest publications, there should be concern about the stories that may not get told at more local levels.

That said, social media has changed the concept of what is local by quickly spreading images of injustice and cries of protest. Social media brought national attention to Trayvon Martin's killing in an Orlando suburb, and Michael Brown's killing in Ferguson, Missouri, in 2014. Black columnists joined the messy fray of both stories. It is worth noting one of the most famous columnists in the country, Maureen Dowd, the white Pulitzer Prize winner for *The New York Times,* has not written about Trayvon. As Campbell and Wiggins (2014) found, white columnists, whether because of newsroom constraints or personal reasons, show little interest in writing about race.

If, as Sandy Banks remarked in her interview, white journalists are unable or unwilling to write about race, then black columnists, freed from the constraints of "objectivity," best serve the news industry by providing the context and real-life

experience of black America and providing a personal window into the souls of black folk today. For those reasons, along with their Pulitzer attention they receive, black columnists seem to be a necessity in the largest newsrooms in this country. This is especially true as the news cycle highlights how much and how little has changed about race in America: the continued battle over voting rights and affirmative action; the election and re-election of the first black president; the high-profile killings of three unarmed young black men, Trayvon Martin, Jordan Davis, and Michael Brown. Elite black columnists and the narrative they construct about the African-American path to equality would seem to be permanent fixtures in racial discourse. In 2013, after Trayvon's killer was set free, Stephen Henderson of *The Detroit Free Press* wrote America's justice system, "the world's greatest," depended on "your own individual sense of right and wrong to deliver fairness or rectitude. We're not there yet" (2013, July 15). During Obama's historic 2008 campaign, *The Washington Post's* Eugene Robinson reached the same conclusion about America. "Tiresome, isn't it?" He wrote then. "All this recounting of unpleasant history, I mean":

> Wouldn't it be great if we could all just move on? Bear with me, though, because this is how we get to the point where, as Obama's young supporters like to chant, "race doesn't matter." No one will be happier than I when we reach that promised land, and we've come so far that at times we can see it, just over the next hill. But we aren't there yet. (2008, June 6)

Appendix A: Sample Analysis of a Column

What follows is an example of how columns were analyzed. Bold-facing, graying and italics are used to simulate analysis done on paper copies of text.

In addition to van Dijk's (2002) Critical Discourse analysis guidelines for "us" and "them" language, the analysis includes Reisigl and Wodak (2001)'s categorizations, including: How are people named and referred to? (2) How are they described, and which qualities or characteristics are attributed to them? (3) Which arguments (explicit and/or implicit) support these characterizations, and/or justify exploiting and discriminating against others? (4) From whose perspective are such namings, descriptions, and arguments expressed? (5) Are articulations explicit or implicit, intensified or mitigated

The sample column is by Colbert I. King of *The Washington Post*. His columns were gathered from Lexis-Nexis. They were first categorized by topic, racial content, and biographical/personal details, with abbreviations (shown below):

B Biographical/Personal	**R Racial (circle, main topic; triangle, mention)**
J Reference to Journalism	**O Obama (circle, main topic, triangle, mention)**

The following categorized were established for local columnists, then adapted for King:

L Local	**E Education**	**P/D Prison/Detention**	**C Culture**
N National	**CS Child Services**	**V/G Violence/Guns**	**O Other**

B J **R O** (Oct. 4, 2008 Sat) Young Deaths That Diminish Us All. **L** N Ed **CS** P/D **V/G** C O

After the first reading, the column was initially categorized by explicit mentions of biography, race, and Obama. Also marked as: Local, Child Services, Violence/Guns

Colbert I. King, Washington Post, October 4, 2008 (Saturday)
Young Deaths That Diminish Us All

The column itself was analyzed for explicit and implicit/latent content. Below is a recreation of how it would be read, with analytical comments in brackets.

The discoveries of the bodies of two girls encased in ice this week and of the decomposed bodies of four sisters earlier this year raise questions that go to the heart of what **we mean when we speak of community.** ***(who is 'we'? Is we racial or broader?)***

Two mothers, Renee Bowman and Banita Jacks, are now jailed in connection with these ghastly events. [names might be racial; no clue given here]

Bowman is suspected of killing two of her adopted daughters and hiding their bodies in a

freezer; she is also charged with abusing a third daughter.

Jacks has been indicted on charges of first-degree murder in the deaths of her four daughters. She has pleaded not guilty; her trial is set for Dec. 1.

Bowman's and Jacks's stories have yet to be told. We don't know exactly what happened. We don't know how, perhaps, those mothers arrived at the point of deciding that their daughters' lives were not worth living.

We also don't know why Bowman and Jacks, if the reports are true, put innocent children through such unimaginable suffering.

Jacks's youngest daughter, age 5, was strangled and beaten. Two of her sisters, ages 6 and 11, had been strangled. The oldest daughter, 16, had puncture wounds on her abdomen. The girls had been dead for as long as six months when their bodies were discovered in January.

Bowman's two daughters, who would now be 9 and 11, may have been in that freezer for more than a year -- one wrapped in a rug; the other in a plastic garbage bag.

Those women will have their dates with the law.

But given what is known now about the circumstances of those deaths, we, as a community, need a date with ourselves. [Point of column; again we]

How can seven girls disappear from public view and not be missed?

The discovery of the two frozen bodies this week happened only because the dead girls' 7-year-old sister was found wandering a Calvert County street wearing a mud-caked nightgown.

The girl, covered with bruises, managed to escape from her mother's house. She told a neighbor that she hadn't eaten in three days, that she had two sisters and that "my mother beat them to death."

Earlier this year, **we** learned about the Jacks girls because U.S. marshals went to Jacks's Southeast rowhouse to serve a routine eviction notice and she told them about the bodies. *[Connecting two crimes together into one thought about their deaths]*

Were it not for the 7-year-old wandering the streets or the marshals serving an eviction notice, those frozen bodies in Calvert County and decomposing corpses in Southeast D.C. would probably still be where they were found.

The girls weren't missed.

How can that be?

Horrible child deaths, to be sure, aren't part of some modern-day urban nightmare. ***[Context begins here; will be biographical as opposed to broad historical]***

[biographical details begin here]**Before I reached my teens in the Foggy Bottom/West**

End neighborhood where I grew up, one friend had drowned in the Potomac River and another in the C&O Canal. A third died from a broken neck in a truck accident, and a fourth boy, who lived nearby in a Foggy Bottom alley dwelling known as Snows Court, was gang-raped and fatally stabbed. *[second time in King columns that drowned friend is mentioned]*

Those boys were known.

Sure, they weren't the community's sole focus from day to day. Grown-ups had lives to lead and struggled to make do for their families. But children weren't isolated from their neighbors. And they didn't have to manage by themselves.

[children better off then; talking nostalgically]

My neighborhood didn't have any Taj Mahals, but kids living there had something to eat, a place to sleep and people who knew they existed. *[not just black nostalgia, but also black self-reliance then – THOUGH HE HASN'T MENTIONED RACE]*

A child had value. When one died, people for blocks around mourned.

A child dropping out of sight and not being missed was next to impossible.
Not today. *[Today's communities are worse]*

At a time when many in the community are focused on the possibility of America electing its first black president, when so many eyes are on Barack Obama, following his every move, it's even more sad that some black children have become isolated, forgotten by the rest of the world, unseen and uncared for.
[EXPLICIT RACIAL REFERENCE TO OBAMA AND COMPARING PLIGHT OF THE BLACK FORGOTTEN]

They are the children who were found in the freezer this week and in those bedrooms in January.

The city, of course, bears much of the weight for those gruesome deaths. The D.C. Child and Family Services Agency recommended Bowman as a suitable adoptive parent. The agency failed to investigate reports of child abuse by Jacks.
[Another criticism of agencies that failed; common theme for King]

The weight, however, also belongs on our shoulders. ***[our-we; black community?]***

We, as a community, didn't see those girls. We didn't even miss them.

To paraphrase **John Donne,** their deaths diminish us all.

*[Reference to Donne, not something black; in early column on girls' deaths, he opened with a Biblical verse]****While he blames agencies and women themselves, this is about community failure***

AFTER ANALYSIS OF ALL COLUMNS AND FINDING FRAMES:

- ***DEVALUED BLACK LIFE (the forgotten);***
- ***BLACK RESPONSIBILITY***
  black nostalgia for stable community;
  black-on-black crime).
- ***ALSO myth of black monolith –Obama to their plight***

Appendix B: Approved IRB Proposal

Study Number: 2014-03-0014
Approval Date: 04/11/2014
Expires: 04/10/2015
Name of Funding Agency (if applicable): n/a

1. Title

Somewhere Between "Us" and "Them":
Black Columnists and Their Role in Shaping Racial Discourse

2. Investigators (Principal)

Kathleen McElroy, Ph.D. candidate, School of Journalism
Dr. Paula M. Poindexter, candidate's dissertation committee chair

3. Purpose of Research

Traditional news coverage shapes racial discourse, which is explicitly and implicitly unfavorable to people of color (Kellstedt, 2003; Entman & Rojecki, 2001; Campbell, 1995; van Dijk; 1991). Yet black reporters are underutilized in determining the news coverage of black communities and their issues (Newkirk, 2000; Wilson, 1991). On the other hand, black leaders often turn to column-writing to reach black readers. For instance, W.E.B. Du Bois turned from academia to the "more effective strategy of 'military journalism,' " including columns in various influential publications, to fight racism (Gates, 2007).

Columns have long been a staple of newspapers and magazines (McNair, 2008; Riley, 1998; Silvester, 1997). The United States is considered "the golden land of the columnist" because of national syndication as well as the readers' desire for local commentary (Silvester, 1997, p. xxv). Columnists are more important in today's struggling print industry because they are easy to brand, use fewer newsroom sources, and offer personal opinion instead of easily accessible facts (McNair, 2008). Still, little if any research has investigated the ways black columnists write about race for mainstream publications with mostly white readership as well as their role overall in racial discourse. To paraphrase what Wilson (1991) calls a paradox for black journalists, are these columnists who happen to be black, or blacks who happen to be columnists? More important, in their own words, which factors flip the switch?

Because previous research on racial coverage and newsrooms focused on lower-positioned reporters, this dissertation focuses on African American columnists honored by the Pulitzer Prize committee, the news industry's most prestigious award, or employed by such influential newspapers as *The New York Times* and *The Los Angeles Times*. This study includes a textual analysis of the columns written by elite black columnists, a

methodology independent of IRB review. Its other major element is semi-structured interviews with the columnists whose work will be analyzed. The goal of the interviews is to learn (1) how they approach writing about race, and whether it is different from column writing about other subjects; and (2) which elements, whether within newsrooms, the community or overall society, constrain and/or encourage their approach to write about race. These interviews will also contribute to an understanding of how newsrooms influence racial coverage, even among the most elite journalists.

5. Procedures

This research includes in-depth interviews with approximately 8 to 12 African Americans who are current or former columnists in mainstream newsrooms. Most are Pulitzer Prize winners or finalists in the commentary division. Other possible participants include current or former columnists at such elite publications as *The New York Times* and *The Wall Street Journal* who are African American (none have received Pulitzer honors). The expected distribution of men to women is at least 5 to 1 (two black women in the past three decades have won Pulitzer Prizes for commentary).

The interviews will be semi-structured; that is, even though similar questions may be asked of most of the participants, the interviews will be heavily influenced by a previously conducted analysis of their columns and also will be guided by the participants' direction of the discussion. A questionnaire is attached.

Each interview is expected to take 60 minutes and may involve a follow-up call or email for clarification.

A. Location: The participants will choose the location of the interviews. They might be conducted in person in their newsrooms or outside their newsrooms, or take place via Skype or telephone. Discussions with journalists who are not part of the study suggests that they might prefer Skype to face-to-face interviewing. All the interviews will be audio and/or video-recorded, if participants agree to such arrangements.

B. Resources. The principal investigator has $2,000 annually for any research from a Harrington doctoral fellowship, but as of yet has not secured any funding specifically for this study.

C. Study Timeline. The Principal Investigator hopes to begin interviews by late April 2014, and conclude them by late July 2014.

6. Measures

Unstructured and semi-structured interviews have wielded important findings about journalism norms, especially in terms of racial coverage (see Newkirk, 2000; Wilson, 1991; Pritchard & Stonbely, 2007). In unstructured interviews with elites, like these prominent columnists and former columnists, the participants often lead the conversation in any direction they choose, and their answers reveal less about an

empirical truth and more about their perspective and standpoint (Dexter, 1967; also see McCracken, 1988). The goal of this research is their individual perspectives as much as overall concepts from the major themes found in the interviews. In addition, the questions will be guided by previous textual analyses of their columns. Still, the Principal Investigator has some points she expects to cover in the interview. A questionnaire is included for review.

7. Participants

a. Target Population. Eight to 12 African Americans who are current or former columnists in mainstream newsrooms. They are all Pulitzer Prize winners or finalists in the commentary division, or current or former columnists at elite publications. The columnists work or have worked at such publications as *The Washington Post, The New York Times, The Boston Globe, The Plain Dealer* (Cleveland), *The New York Daily News* and the *Chicago Tribune.* Former columnists work in academia (Morgan State University and University of Georgia) and for non-profit political organizations (Demos).

b. Inclusion/Exclusion. Per the research goals, the participants are African American. The expected distribution of men to women is at least 5 to 1 (two black women in the past two decades have won the Pulitzer Prize for commentary).

c. Benefits. Direct benefits to participants are unlikely. However, the journalism profession and communication field may gain more attention to the contribution of black journalists to the news industry and to racial discourse overall, and a greater understanding of the struggles they may face or have overcome. The news industry would gain insight into the experiences of high-profile black journalists and their methods for discussing race, a longstanding issue in news coverage.

d. Risks. This research involves minimal risk. It will be conducted with adult subjects who have voluntarily agreed to be interviewed at a time and place of their choosing either in person, by telephone or by Skype (live video interchange). The type of interview is based on the participants' preference.

This research does not include any element of psychological or physical risk to the participants, and will be conducted using the highest ethical standards.

e. Recruitment. The PI initially will contact the potential participants via email (the PI has their email addresses). The recruitment email is included.

f. Obtaining Informed Consent. Because the research seeks to identify the participants in regard to their comments, the PI plans to obtain written consent from the subjects to do so. The consent form makes clear that they are not only are consenting to the interviews but to being identified with their comments. The consent form also will make clear that they have the option to remain anonymous for some or all of the interview and would be identified by pseudonym.

A consent form, to be emailed or faxed to participants before the interviews, is attached for review.

8. Privacy and Confidentiality. The participants are being interviewed because of their known position as columnists or former columnists at mainstream newspapers. The PI is seeking consent to identify them with their comments. Some of their quotes could be attributed, and some could be referenced as part of a group. Participants can request for the interviews to be confidential for portions or all of the interview.

9. Confidentiality of the Data or Samples

a. Data collection and security. The conversations will be recorded and stored on the PI's personal, password-protected computer; the PI will transcribe and analyze the interviews. Analysis will include identifying themes, evaluating their similarities and differences, and other emergent findings. The final result will be compiled and submitted as part of the PI's dissertation.
b. The PI will keep the data until the completion and multiple publications of the study, which should occur within three years after the data are collected. The data (recordings and/or transcripts) will be destroyed after three years.
c. The transcripts and any recordings of data will not be shared with other researchers.

10. Compensation. There will be no compensation for the participants.

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Appendix C: IRB-Approved Questions for In-Depth Interviews

Kathleen McElroy
University of Texas at Austin, School of Journalism
917-693-0548
kathleenmcelroy@utexas.edu

These interviews will be semi-structured (that is, the participant can lead the discussion in any direction), but some of these questions are expected to be asked.

1. On a scale of 1 to 10, how much autonomy do you believe you have in writing a column? Why did you pick that number? Does that number change when your column is about race? Why? Talk about the role of the newsroom, if any, when you write about race.

2. Let's talk about duality for black journalists. [A prompt if needed] In the early 1990s, a black journalism scholar [Clint Wilson] wrote that the perceived paradox for black journalists is: are they journalists who happen to be black, or blacks who happen to be a journalists? What do you think of that statement? Does it pertain to you? If so, which factors make one concept more crucial than the other at any given time? How do you think your colleagues or your readers would respond to this quote-unquote paradox?

3. What factors motivate you to write about race? For instance, is it news-driven? On the other hand, what discourages or makes you less interested in writing about race?

4. Describe how writing a column centered on race is similar or different from writing other columns. I'd like to discuss some specific columns…

5. How would you describe your audience? How, if at all, does it change when you write about race?

Thank you so much. I truly appreciate your taking time from your busy schedule to speak with me. I hope I can contact you later to clarify some of your answers. And I would be happy to share my findings with you on this topic when they are ready. Please don't hesitate to contact me for updates.

Appendix D: IRB-Approved Initial Email Invitation

From: kathleenmcelroy@mail.utexas.edu
To: [e-mail of participating columnist]
Subject: Research on columns and racial discourse– Seeking your input

Dear [Name of columnist]:
My name is Kathleen McElroy, and I'm a former New York Times editor who is now completing a doctorate in journalism at the University of Texas at Austin. My research focuses on the ways news content and newsrooms shape racial coverage and racial discourse.

Specifically, my dissertation centers on the work of prominent African American columnists at mainstream newspapers. That is why I am contacting you for your input.

Would you consider granting me an interview about your column-writing processes [to be modified for former columnists]? I'm interested in learning what influences you, and the newsroom factors that might come into play. The interview, which can take place in person, on Skype or on the telephone, would take about an hour. Your responses will help add to the industry's and academia's understanding of this little-researched topic: prominent black journalists and their influence on racial discourse in America.

I hope that our conversations can be on the record and I can identify you with your comments. But you can participate while maintaining your anonymity.
Portions of the interview or the entire interview can be confidential, with your name replaced with a pseudonym. In both cases, the complete interviews and their transcripts will be kept private on my personal, password-protected computer and will not be shared with other research. I will destroy the interviews after three years.

I will call you in early May to confirm your receipt of this e-mail and, I hope, to schedule an appointment.

Thank you in advance for considering to participate. And please contact me if you any questions or comments.

Kathleen McElroy
Doctoral candidate, University of Texas at Austin, School of Journalism
(917) 693-0538

Glossary

Black Press: An umbrella industry term for black-owned news organizations, particularly print publications. From the turn of the 20th century through post-World War II, the Black Press and its leading publications, *The Chicago Defender* and *The Pittsburgh Courier*, were arguably America's most influential private black institutions in America. Its circulation and clout waned in the mid-1960s, but the Black Press is valued as a black public sphere during civic crises, like the South Central riots (Jacobs, 2001).

Critical Discourse Analysis: Discourse is seen as doing the work of and for ideology, especially to maintain dominance over racial and ethnic minorities. Leading and prolific proponents include Teun A. van Dijk, Norman Fairclough, and Ruth Wodak. Uta Quasthoff is credited for steering discourse analysis toward categorization of prejudice in the 1970s (Reisigl & Wodak, 2001, p. 19)

Double Consciousness: W.E.B. Du Bois' seminal articulation of the conflicted black American psyche, famously expressed in *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903). Referred to in the opening chapter, double consciousness is "a peculiar sensation": "this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his twoness, – an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder."

Freedom's Journal: The first black newspaper in America. It was a weekly first published on March 16, 1827, in New York. The founding editors/publishers were Samuel Cornish and John B. Russwurm, who resigned in September 1827. It closed in 1829.

Narrative Identity: A theoretical concept originally associated with psychology studies. According Dan P. McAdams, a pioneer in the field, narrative identity is the "internalized and evolving story of the self that a person constructs to make sense and meaning out of his or her life. The story is a selective reconstruction of the autobiographical past and a narrative anticipation of the imagined future that serves to explain, for the self and others, how the person came to be and where his or her life may be going" (2011, p. 99).

Pulitzer Prize: The prizes were a provision in publisher Joseph Pulitzer's 1904 will and were established as an incentive to excellence. They are administered by Columbia University. The Pulitzer for Commentary, first awarded in 1970, is given for "distinguished commentary, using any available journalistic tool."

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Vita

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This dissertation was typed by the author.